

Hello everyone! *clears throat* I have an announcement to make... *Snape snorts* I am starting a new story!

This has NO CONNECTION WHATSOEVER with my 'Narrator Snape' series (which I have been writing up to now). As you will see, Snape is not narrating here, for one. I wanna try out a little different Severus...

... that and he requested at wand-point that I make a story where Harry gets much more tortured than he does. *laughs* I had to say yes.

For those reading 'Full Circle', there is no need to worry-- I will continue both stories without letting either slide. But as I said before, they are irrelevant.

'Go with the Tide' starts in the summer after GoF, as so many 'torture Harry and see how Snape reacts' stories do.

Can you tell I am already having fun?

It is the last time you burn my bacon, boy! I will give you a lesson that you shall never forget you worthless waste of life!...

DON'T YOU DARE GLARE AT ME!

....

Severus Snape still was smirking to himself in disgust and indignacy. At times he couldn't understand Dumbledore's way of thinking, and why he had to be involved in every escapade that old coot came up with. Or his reasoning. Like what he had to do today. Rescue Harry bloody Potter. And why, one might have asked? Because Sybil predicted his imminent demise.

As if Sybil predicted anything else.

Snape had nearly started laughing when Dumbledore told him how he had decided to get the Golden Boy back to Hogwarts only a month into the holidays. But Dumbledore would not let him off the hook, and

what's worse, he didn't let Snape even get some of the venom he felt churning in his chest out like usual, and virtually kicked the Potions Master out of the office pleading the utmost urgency.

Hah.

That had been precisely the reason Snape had taken a long, soaking bath that lasted forty minutes before carefully picking out his muggle clothes and going to Hogsmeade to disappear to number 4 Privet Drive. He had even tried on his black jeans and shirt for style, like a meticulous boy before a date. Anything to waste as much time as possible.

But at last, Severus Snape was standing in front of the house. It was late afternoon, and people were starting to get back into their homes. Snape swore under his breath. He would have preferred it if it had been night, but he had not come up with anything to do to waste time for that long.

With his most disgusted scowl, he walked up to the muggle house and knocked on the door.

Nothing.

Muttering under his breath that they had better not have gone on some surprise trip to the seaside, he knocked harder.

Still nothing.

Snape turned around to leave, so angry he was bordering to livid. He had been sent for nothing to an empty house. Storming down the driveway, he kicked hard the first suitable letout for his frustration. It just happened to be the Dursley dustbin. The force was so much that even though the bin was full, it tipped over with a big crash, and garbage rolled out. Snape couldn't care less. That is, until one item caught his eye and checked his speed.

Potter's glasses. And closer to the dustbin, what seemed to be the burned remains of the boy's transfiguration textbook. Or was it

potions? Snape lingered, for a moment perplexed. He picked up the glasses tentatively.

They were smashed.

Pocketing them unconsciously, Snape walked back to the front door and knocked the door as hard as he possibly could. When nobody answered, he pulled out his wand and let himself in with the unlocking charm. It seemed to be a deserted house. Snape had been in enough to be able to tell. He frowned to himself. Something was off. Something that he couldn't quite pinpoint at the moment but yet he perceived. Nobody was inside. Shutters were down, beds were made, and even the refrigerator was locked. But if it was deserted...

... why did the house smell as if they had just roasted meat? Snape didn't like how this was going at all. The slow creeping anticipation and the prickling of his skin were dead signs that whatever he found out, he was not going to like. And Snape hated things that displeased him.

"Potter. Out now." he commanded in an irritated voice.

Still no answer. But Snape was a spy. He somehow knew that although there was little life in the building, there still was some. He could feel, just below hearing threshold, a ragged breathing. But where? He checked and double checked every room in the house. Even the one that seemed like a storage room, with bars at the window, although it seemed preposterous that anyone could live there.

There was no sign of the young Gryffindor he was after. It was exactly that which alarmed him: It seemed as though Harry Potter did not live in this house. There was no article of clothing, no possession that he could recognise, no photograph to mark the boy's existence. He might as well have been in the wrong house.

Yet Snape was well aware that he was not in the wrong house. Standing in the middle of the living room, he contemplated, then as if taking a decision, he poised his wand.

"Point me."

The wand tilted and tugged towards a direction, and Snape followed, perplexed. Surely he can't have missed anything upstairs. He had even looked under the beds. He realised the wand stopped pulling on him, a sign that he had arrived to his destination. He blinked, arching an eyebrow. He was standing in front of a cupboard under the stairs.

He snorted and scowled. Perfect. The family had obviously gone on an excursion and Potter had locked his magical possessions here for safekeeping, which made the wand point him here.

Still, this was the only place Snape hadn't looked for the boy.

"Bah. Might as well, for the sake of argument." Snape muttered under his breath, and uttered the spell.

"Alohomora."

The door swung open, revealing a dark interior. The burned flesh smell hit him much stronger than before. Snape could feel the hairs at the base of his skull lift. What was going on? Alarms of all sort went off in his mind, and he forgot his dissatisfaction and contempt as he whispered Lumos to further look inside.

What he beheld made his eyes turn colder than pewter, his teeth clench in anger, his hand holding up the wand white at the knuckles. He had finally found Harry Potter. And he had been wrong.

Inside the cupboard lay hunched a boy he barely recognised as the cheeky adolescent he wanted to erase from the student lists of Hogwarts. He was laying on a tool box and some shoeboxes, in an odd arch, his head tilting completely backwards. Snape doubted the boy was even conscious. Potter's face was a bloody mess, as if someone had hit him many times over there, or used the boy's head to make a dent in a wall. Under the light of the wand there were little glittering pieces there as well. Merlin, could this be glass shards? Looking further down, he found out what the source of the smell had been: Potter's right hand and forearm was a mass of burnt flesh,

sinewy and wet, like someone had made him hold a hot cattle prod for far too long...

Snape did not want to see anything more. Tentatively, he placed two long, elegant fingers at the boy's neck, and established with some relief that Harry was still alive. Thank Merlin for that Potter, or Dumbledore would have my hide for real. He strengthened the light from his wand and put it in his pocket so that its tip would still cast some enough illumination so that he could see what he was doing. As he gathered up the limp form into his arms, he felt rage. For many things. First off, for being subjected to this sight that shattered so many of his convenient preconceptions for the bane of his existence. Now he would never be able to look upon the boy without remembering the cupboard under the stairs. Considerable less leverage for harrassment, and Snape -liked- harrassing Harry Potter.

Second off, he was sent to retrieve and rescue the boy when he was only just into the new circle Voldemort had created, and still under scrutiny for his loyalties. If any hostile eye saw him, the next gathering would be his last. What was Dumbledore -thinking-? Snape felt that at the moment he hated the old wizard.

And third off, who would that the gall, the perversion to do this to a child except a drunken Death Eater? And whatever for? Even at his worst moments, when Snape truly wished for Potter's death, he never had quite conceived torture such as this for the boy.

"Where are you going with that!? Get OUT of my HOUSE!"

Snape's terrible gaze was fixed on the wide frame of the man standing in the front door holding a beach umbrella, a tall thin woman peeking behind him. Snape smiled at Vernon. And when he smiled in mental states as these, Snape was extremely dangerous.

"Did you do this?" he asked with a silky, calm voice that could chill hell and shifted his hold on Harry.

"The boy is mine, freak! Give me what is mine!" the man turned purple and walked in, the beach umbrella like a battling rod, mistaking Snape's low tones for a sign of weakness.

"Nothing I would like better." Snape assented and pulled out his wand.

end Chapter 1. Warning: full effect of Harry's injuries to be displayed yet. Opinions? Should I continue this or not?

is amazed at all the reviews I absolutely love you people. Thank you very much. See what your wonderful reviewing made me do: I update the VERY NEXT DAY!

I should have listened to Snape earlier. heh. *Snape smirks*

Replies to comments are at the end :)

Before I start, some facts about me and this story: This is NOT happy-go-lucky. This is a story where both parties have to work in order to reach a goal. This is NOT a slash story. I don't write slash. I never did, never will because I simply can't understand a relationship like that, without wanting to sound condemning. I am not condemning it, I just don't touch on the subject.

Okay, chapter 2 *hits play*

Voldemort inspected the select few of the dark-clad figures with the eerie, white masks. He nodded to Wormtail who shivering, went to shut the door and put up all the wards his master required before the gathering was to start. Voldemort gazed at Nagini with his crimson, emotionless eyes and when the snake slithered to him, he started to speak while petting her.

"A rather... interesting turn of events has been drawn to my attention..." he said softly, the 's's in his speech standing out a little bit, "... would anyone care to guess as to what I am referring to?"

Silence fell among the standing Death Eaters that did not dare look to each other, in each one's mind a million possibilities racing. In all of them, except one. Snape's hesitation lasted only fractions of a second before he took a step forward, keeping his head bent and his hands folded, waiting for permission to speak from the Dark Lord.

"Remove your mask." came the usual order, and kneeling down, Snape complied, making sure his eyes were kept lowered. Voldemort smiled, as if to himself.

"Ah, Ssseverusss...," he drew out the name on purpose, "inform us, my loyal Potionss Massster."

As Snape took a deep breath, the idea that Voldemort had a hedonistic way of pronouncing the word 'master' raced through his mind. He banished the thought, his body tense and tougher than concrete. He needed all his wits about him for this.

"Harry Potter has come to Hogwarts, my Lord, for the rest of the summer. He is close to dying as we speak."

Murmur started to sound before it was abruptly stopped. No doubt by one cold glance from Tom Riddle, thought Snape. He always forced himself to think of Voldemort as Tom while being interrogated. It was an anchor that helped Snape not to lose it. The nasal voice snapped him back to attention.

"And in what way has he reached this state, Severuss?"

Snape's backbone tensed, making him rigid in the kneeling position he was in. This was the crucial question. Like when he had been in the Dursley house and his instinct had persisted that Potter was inside it, the same instinct now told him that his life depended on how he answered this seemingly normal, clear question about happenings. How much of the truth should he reveal and in what way? What did Tom Riddle think had happened, and how much of an alternate version of the events could he accept and believe?

Blasted Potter boy. Snape's loathing rose like a black tidal wave at the predicament he was in and that Potter had rendered him in. Cautiously, carefully, he started on his answer like a trapeze artist starting his walk across a stretched rope.

"My Lord, Dumbledore sent me to retrieve Potter from his home on some allegations by Sybil Trelawney that he was in mortal danger. Trelawney of course never makes a true prediction--"

"I KNOW about that bat! It's Potter I want to know about!" Voldemort erupted and Snape cowered back, biting his tongue so hard that

blood oozed out in his mouth. He swallowed it and continued on, bending even lower in front of Voldemort's feet.

"Yes, my Lord. I therefore went to Potter's muggle home. Of course the boy was not near death. He was slightly beaten up over the head by his relatives. He was already unconscious when I got there. I beg your forgiveness my Lord, but the temptation was far too great; Dumbledore was expecting a near-death boy back. Although I could not bring him to you because of the wards, I was well aware the headmaster would not suspect me if I... toyed with the boy somewhat. I... got carried away when his relatives returned to their house." Snape finished and shut his eyes, as his head was bent, hoping beyond hopes, begging to whatever deity there existed that Voldemort would buy this tale and accept it as evidence of Snape's loyalty to him.

There was a longer pause, in which Snape could only hear his heart beating irregularly. Cursing in his mind, he hoped that his blood forever rested on Potter's hands and the guilt slowly kill him. But the thoughts were instantly dispersed when he heard Voldemort get up from his throne, Nagini slithering quietly away. Abnormally long, bony fingers touched his shoulders and he was made to look up in the distorted, half human face of Tom Riddle.

"That was nicely done, my loyal friend... you set the standard for your comrades..." he started in his low, once-alluring voice. Snape braced himself. Now he would see if his moment of death had arrived.

"... you shall be rewarded greatly... for you can keep your life and continue serving me, and in addition I shall give you a reminder...."

The bony hands detached themselves from Snape and he lowered his eyes again as the Dark Lord stepped backwards.

"Harry Potter is mine to toy with or kill. None of you have the right to assault him, even in your zeal to serve me. You should have remembered that, Severus. Crucio."

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When Snape returned to his chambers, his body was considerably weaker but his foul mood was considerably stronger. He was looking forward for a bit of a night's sleep away from it all, not a one-on-one meeting with Dumbledore, who was waiting for him in his chambers.

Snape looked at him warily.

"How did you get in here... I thought my rooms were properly warded." he scowled weakly. He was too tired to growl, and he had a distasteful feeling that that was precisely why Dumbledore did not want to wait until the morning. The old wizard was looking at him with concern, even worry, the twinkle in his eyes faded somewhat.

"Hogwarts castle's chambers never obstruct the headmaster's passage, Severus. Are you alright?"

"Of course I am not alright! I got back from an interrogation with Voldemort and nearly lost my LIFE because you sent me to get that goddamn accident prone boy around which your world revolves. Of course I am not alright and I wish the tyke had never been born!" Snape said exasperated, finally the tension he had had to harness at the gathering finding a let out.

Dumbledore did not speak until Snape had crossed to his storeroom and drank the usual series of potions he needed to somewhat restore homeostasis to his body after a gathering had ended. He did not speak when Snape stared at him with the 'why are you still here?' look on his face. Or when even later he used the 'speak or get out' look.

Snape finally gave in.

"What do you want to tell me, Albus?" he said in a voice that had no venom or malice, but a lot of tiredness and resignation. He sank into an armchair and looked as Dumbledore swallowed and prepared to speak. He knew that look. He hated it.

"Not about Potter, Albus. Not tonight."

"He's blind, Severus."

Snape blinked, and his eyebrow went almost to his hairline. The Golden Boy, blind?

"How on earth did he manage that?" he managed to ask.

Dumbledore looked to the side, his fingers knitting through his long white beard. Snape shivered. Not even Voldemort was as scary a sight as Albus looking old and tired against hardship.

"Poppy says it is the hit or hits he must have received in the head. There were some shards from a mirror in the boy's forehead and eyes."

"Does he still have them?" Snape asked, interested. He felt grimly satisfied about giving Vernon exactly what he deserved.

"If you mean his eyes, yes, he does, but they are far too damaged for sight. Poppy healed them up so there is no scarring visible and no alteration of his eyeballs, but she can't restore his sight."

Silence ensued as Snape took some time for the new information to sink in, and Dumbledore did not continue, as if the words he was uttering were tiring him immensely. Finally, Snape broke the heaviness by asking:

"Any chance of recuperation?"

The older wizard gently shook his head. Snape took in a breath.

"Voldemort doesn't have to know. Not immediately. But definitely before Malfoy's son arrives in September."

Dumbledore nodded grimly and then looked at Snape.

"Suddenly time is very pressing on us both, Severus."

Snape decidedly did not like that. But it was not anything he did not anticipate. Dejectedly, he pushed himself out of the armchair, virtually hearing his joints squeak in protest.

"Let's go see the damn Golden Boy then, Albus."

For all the times that Snape thought of how much he hated Dumbledore, he ended up hating not the headmaster, but the idea of not providing support for the one person that dared trust and believe in him after all he had done in his past. After all, Dumbledore was the reason the Potions Master was still alive.

They walked out of the dungeons and towards the infirmary. Dumbledore was walking rather slowly, yet Snape had a growing suspicion that the older man was doing so because he did not want to tire Snape more than he already was after his ordeal earlier in the night. He did not confront him with it though, because Snape felt he actually did need the slower pace.

"I hope the Dursleys didn't give you any trouble." Dumbledore asked in an odd tone that compelled Snape to glance at the headmaster. There was a small smile playing under the white beard, and Snape wondered if Dumbledore hadn't sent his most vindictive of the staff members to get a boy from his abusers for a good reason. He looked ahead and smirked to himself.

"Not at all. They were... rather amusing."

"I hope not too much?"

"They are alive, Albus... they are undeserving death... they will suffer for longer than that."

With that statement, Severus Snape entered the infirmary, where only one bed was occupied. He approached it and looked down on the sleeping boy mutely. His eyes were covered by a bandage around his head. His hand was also bandaged to the elbow. At his bedside were several potions that made Snape clench his teeth again. He did not need Poppy to tell him what the boy had suffered, when he could recognise in a heartbeat what each potion was for.

The boy had had internal bleeding, severe concussion and heart irregularity from shock.

"Has he woken up yet?" Snape asked DUmbleDore softly.

"Not yet. He does not know, Severus."

Snape clicked his tongue in irritation at the sight.

"He is far too weak to serve his purpose."

"Severus. He is not a soldier. He is a 15 year old undernourished boy."

Snape did not let the words mollify him in the least.

"Don't fool yourself Albus. A soldier is all he is to the wizarding world, and he has to be able to fit the role when the time comes, or everything will have been in vain."

"What are you saying?"

Snape paused. What -was- he saying? He looked down at the prone figure. The boy looked serene and sad, sleeping in the sterile bed. Weak. Very weak but in the same time Snape couldn't deny detecting something other than weakness radiating from the boy. Determination. Stubbornness. Patience. Loyalty.

All good ingredients for strength. And he had to admit that if for 15 years the boy had survived his guardians and not become a twisted, bitter subhuman version of himself, he had demonstrated strength of profound enormity despite his weak appearance.

Yes. He felt that there might be some potential in the boy.

"What potential do you mean Severus?"

Snape realised that he had spoken the last thought out loud. He answered truthfully, as he did whenever he saw even the slightest hope for leverage against Voldemort.

"I think the boy's blindness can be turned into a strength, a weapon rather than a drawback."

"But who would teach him to convert an impediment into a strength?"

Snape saw the renewed twinkle in the headmaster's eyes a fraction of a second too late.

"I could." he said and instantly regretted doing so, for he knew that he had at the very second he admitted that, accepted the responsibility of Potter's training.

Dumbledore hugged the younger man in a fatherly gesture of pride that succeeded in mollifying Snape enough not to try to even attempt waiving his new, yet unspoken, responsibility. It was rare that Snape saw pride in anyone's eyes that he had put there, and that downpayment was enough to cement his decision to educate Harry Potter, the bane of his existence and epitome of anything Gryffindor.

"I knew I could count on you, my boy." Dumbledore said and left quickly. Snape felt slightly slack jawed. The old coot had manipulated him into thinking up what Dumbledore had wanted him to do in the first place.

Oh, how he hated Harry bloody Potter.

end ch2. Ha ha! Don't expect me to be graphic from the start, OR to reveal what happened to the Dursleys from the start, OR wake Harry up in the second chapter. I had to set standards for Snape's and Harry's working relationship first! he he!

I absolutely love you all! 50 reviews! I wrote this up immediately. It's just too bad I have to wait till Sunday to upload it. I wanted to instantly reward you.

To all the reviewers that threatened or asked or begged me to write more I have two things to say: THANK YOU! and 'Ask and ye shall receive.'

Now to the rather larger or different reviews:

Rogue Reviewer: Are you cheerleading?

Hummingfox: Well done for questioning how Albus detected a true prediction of Sybil's. The question will eventually occur to Snape as well. As for the rest of the characters, watch as they make the scene :)

Midnight Shadow: You flatter me. Thank you :) And indeed the set up is always a good one.

Laure Rune: Indeed. I do not appreciate insta-healing wounds either.

Angel Baby: you got it! *gives you a cookie for guessing the most permanent of injuries*

krissy P: you probably have already been reassured if you have read everything up to here: I just don't do slash by definition. :)

excessivelyperky: all in good time, all in good time.

TheLostPoet: *glances at Snape who sneers and looks away* err... well I hope he won't! *chuckles* as a matter of fact, any psychology major might be able to pick up little clues that Snape even now isn't as tough and heartless as he desperately tries to be.

sherlock 2k: He was not coldhearted... was he? and I thought he was being far too responsive to Harry's plight! *chuckles* Snape has a code of his own to display his true loyalties and deepest thoughts. It is very subtle and hard to pick up. I am trying to keep it as hidden as possible, yet still there.

t.a.g.: Hey hey there! I thought you had quit reading me! *chuckles* Harry basically has had his head bashed into a mirror several times. well, one of the things that were done to him, at least.

DraconicalPriest: Snape intends to stay uncuddly as much as humanly possible. *laughs* and yes I agree that Harry couldn't heal his way out of a paper bag.

Enfleurance: As Snape belatedly realised, Dumbledore sent him because he knew he'd do more than verbally assault the Dursleys after seeing what they did to Harry. And he probably trusts Snape's wit enough to talk himself out of mortal danger. Which he did. :)

Setsuri: one cruciatus, properly delivered.

melly-chan: I shall try, believe you me.

Nightfall's Wing: I am not scared, I got Snape! *he sneers behind her* but -he- will not be happy if I don't continue, so... here you are. Second installment.

Mikee: there you go, some answers provided.

see you soon, all!

a disgruntled Snape carries her in, set her in a chair, hands her hanky and snort indignantly gods. I hate being sick. I am so dizzy I need to hold on to stuff when I move .

It is, however, the perfect state in which to write the awakenings of Harry Potter, is it not? hehe.

77 reviews! Such motivation you provide. I am much indebted, and I answer to posts at the end of the chapter. If I beat the 90 reviews threshold, I'll try to update almost daily.

Chapter 3 *hits play*

Snape did not visit the infirmary again during the time Harry remained asleep. He felt restless, irritable beyond measure and could not stay in one place. He roamed the castle endlessly, looking at it here and there as if measuring it up, then muttering under his breath in a voice that implied unflattering ruminations.

But most of his time, he spent in the quidditch pitch. He walked in it, sat in the pews, then went down and walked in it again, and occasionally, he would ride a broom and make a few rounds.

Everything in Severus Snape's movements showed apprehension, preoccupation and extreme planning. That is, if anyone bothered to look further than the obvious dissatisfaction and enormous aggression that graced his person whenever anyone was unlucky enough to be nearby.

Time after time had Snape tried to convince Dumbledore that perhaps the boy would be more receptive with someone else-- McGonagall, or Flitwick or even that werewolf Lupin -- than himself.

"Let them get the boy used to the new state of affairs, and then I shall teach him, Albus." he would always say, and Dumbledore would always shake his head.

"I do not trust them with Harry as I do with you, Severus."

That statement had surprised the Potions Master so much that he had stopped dead on his tracks and looked at the headmaster as if he had grown two heads.

"Come again, Albus? Of course you trust them, they virtually worship the boy."

"Which is exactly why they are unfit at the moment for what young Harry will need. If he is coddled too much, he will be allowed to withdraw into himself, become weaker instead of stronger. He will be, in so many words, spoiled when he least needs it."

Snape snorted, but the image of the boy in the cupboard made him bite down on his acidic comment. Instead he asked in a lazy voice:

"And what makes you trust me that I will not harrass him beyond breaking point?"

Dumbledore's eyes had twinkled more then, and he clapped Snape on the shoulder once before continuing their walk.

"The fact, my boy, that you just asked me that."

Snape frowned, unsure if he was irked or relieved.

It was seven whole days before Snape set foot in the infirmary again. Seven whole days of meticulous preparation and planning and steeling of nerves. Snape had no misconceptions of what he was about to undertake, and how ugly it could become. But he was determined. He had given yet another promise. And Snape always kept each and every one of them.

Harry had woken up the previous noon. He had heard the wails as he walked past the infirmary doors. They were in anger, in despair, and self-pity. It was the self-pity that angered the Potions Master, and the despair that made him quicken his pace.

He entered the room. The window was open, letting the sun stream in and warm the beds, the birds could be heard chirping happily. It was far too cheerful for Snape's tastes. He made every effort to be silent

as he approached the only bed which was occupied. It appeared that the boy was still sleeping.

He gazed over Harry. His face had a few scrapes and scratches, but that would mend very soon. The bandage around his eyes was gone. He was very thin, the skin tightening over his cheekbones and stretching over the bit of collarbone that the open dressing gown allowed him to see. The right hand clutching the coverlet was still bandaged, and Snape figured it would remain so for quite some time - and if the scarring there was too much, perhaps forever.

Snape sat down in the chair and clicked his tongue irritably.

"I know you are awake Potter. Might as well drop the act now." he said indifferently.

The hand clutching the coverlet relaxed, but the boy did not move. Snape went on.

"Did you hear me approach?"

No answer. Snape's brow furrowed.

"Are you deaf in addition to blind?" he snapped.

The boy's breathing became heavier, but still Harry did not answer. Snape felt the urge to growl, but held it back.

"Very well," he said with his most indifferent voice, "you have given up. I knew that the Golden Boy was merely a gilded mirage. You are not worth my time." he spat the last sentence and got up to leave, but with no real hurry.

He had almost reached the exit before Harry's voice was heard.

"What the hell is your problem?"

Snape shut his eyes and allowed a faint smile of triumph before he returned to the boy's bedside. Perhaps this wouldn't be as difficult as he thought if Potter was so easily taunted to react.

"You are my problem, Potter, as always. I thought even with your intellectual level, you would have drawn that conclusion by now." he said as he resumed his seat by the chair. He scrutinized the boy as he spoke. He was staring up at the ceiling, his green eyes still bright yet unmoving, dead. Snape had a nasty image of those dead unmoving eyes staring up at him accusingly in a battlefield. He shook the image away. The boy was alive, his eyes, although unmoving, were bright with life. They were not glassy, nothing was yet lost.

"You are staring at me, aren't you?" Harry said in a low voice Snape knew was dangerous. Before the Potions Master had a chance to answer, the boy continued, in his voice creeping anger that gradually became stronger and stronger.

"Are you finally satisfied? Are you happy to see me like this? No more roaming in invisibility cloaks, no more glaring at you, no more plotting and adventures! You can finally sleep soundly -Professor- Snape, free of worries that I will ever be in your way because I am a cripple that won't be able to even finish school this way!"

Harry was yelling by the end of his tirade. Snape caught himself smiling again faintly. He liked the anger he saw, even if it was directed at himself. Anger implied the energy needed to fuel it, the rebellion of the spirit that would be vital if Harry was to rise above this. The situation was becoming better and better. And given the fact that Snape couldn't care less if the boy liked him or not, his enormous anger did little to affect the tall, dark man.

"Indeed I am enormously grateful to providence that you will be far more manageable like this. But I am not satisfied."

Harry sneered in a way that Snape did not expect.

"Why not? There will be far more chances to earn your Order of Merlin now, won't there?"

Finally, indignation and anger welled up in the Potions Master to match Harry's. He leaned in, inches away from the boy's profile.

"I will never probably get the full story on how you did it, Potter-- but what goes around comes around."

Harry sneered again and turned his face away from the heated breath he felt brushing against his cheek.

Snape was angered by remembering Black, his lost distinction, the undeniable glee he had seen in Harry's eyes at the time, and his helplessness to react, to do anything about it. But indeed, the tables were turned. Now it was Potter who was helpless, it was Potter that would have no choice-- and in much more cruel a way than the Potions Master could ever have wished for.

"Fun as the chit chat is, Potter, I did not come here to waste me time by your incessant prattle," he started with a malicious, dangerous tint in his voice that was obviously getting to Harry, even though the boy was not moving, "I am here to make an announcement to you. By tomorrow, Pomfrey informs me you will be fit to be discharged. Tomorrow starts our crash course to blindness. I will expect you out in the quidditch pitch. 9 in the morning. Sharp, or I will come and get more you resist, the harder it will be on you. I beg you to resist as much as possible." the little warm puff of breath underlined the last word.

With that, Snape sailed out of the infirmary like a harpy that had just looked in the mirror.

Next day, when by 9:15 Harry had not showed up, Snape careened into the infirmary again. Poppy got in his way.

"Severus, have a little heart. The boy is still under shock." the nurse murmured to him. He sneered and pushed her to the side, not too roughly, but decidedly.

"You know I have no heart, Poppy. And he has a task to do." he snorted and marched to the bed, grabbed the sulking Harry from both his shoulders and set him on his feet. Harry shrieked in anger.

"You have no right to do this to me! Get your hands off me!"

Snape sneered.

"You gave me the right, Potter. If you had been on time instead of using your impediment to slack, I wouldn't even consider touching you in any way. Now get dressed. You got 2 minutes, or I will get you out there just as you are, in the hospital gown and barefooted." he said in the same matter-of-fact, relentless way he used in his potions class.

Harry shook his shoulders free and sat on the bed, stubbornly doing nothing. Snape did not seem fazed. If anything, he looked eager, begging for Harry not to get dressed as he had instructed. When Poppy approached to help the boy, Snape shook his head.

"He can do it on his own when he's done being prissy." he said nonchalantly. Harry growled.

"You can't make me do anything! Where is the Headmaster? He'll show you!"

Snape laughed. A cold, mirthless laughter.

"You think that if the Headmaster hadn't assigned you to me, I would even be bothering to waste my precious student-free vacations with the likes of you, Potter?"

Harry paled.

"D- Dumbledore assigned you to me?"

"That is correct, Potter. Remarkable sense of hearing." Snape sneered, enjoying his new way of harrassing Harry Potter without the cupboard image hindering him in the least. He looked at the clock. "You have one minute left before you parade your behind in the whole castle." he said in amusement and anticipation he did not try to hide.

Harry bristled, again taking Snape's dare. He fingered around for his clothes and scowled.

"I don't even know where my clothes are."

"Then use your head to retrieve them, Potter. It is time you started to use that contraption on your shoulders." Snape drawled.

Harry's cheeks flushed in anger, which contrasted with his pale, sickly skin. He looked like a sick angry kitten. Snape didn't know whether he should laugh or look away. The boy's eyes were unfocused and off target, but they still managed to burn daggers into the Potions Master. Snape smirked, not without satisfaction that he would have this chance to humiliate the boy and chalk it up to 'special handling'. Harry's cold voice made him pay attention again.

"Accio pants. Accio robe."

Despite the disappointment, Snape was satisfied that the wheels could still turn in the Gryffindor's head. He snorted to show his indignation and thus reward the boy for his efforts.

"40 seconds left, Potter. I'll come and get you." he said as distastefully as he could manage.

40 seconds later, he returned to find Harry dressed, head slightly bend in brooding, his hand on the bed's rail, staring at some middle distance. Poppy was glaring murder at the Potions Master, and he had no doubts that the medi-witch had helped the boy get dressed despite his order not to. That had been the reason he had walked out in the first place.

He hrumphed to get the boy's attention.

"Right, Potter. I am glad you managed the 3-year-old developmental milestone. Follow me. It's time we started." he said, sarcasm dripping from his voice and about turned to leave.

It had begun.

There! Session #1 in the next chapter! That didn't go too badly, did it? hehe. Comments please! Opinions! Is my Severus too lenient? Too harsh? I need to know by a third party.

Kateydidn't: There is a good reason for that-- basically because magic eyes like Moody's can be cursed, destroyed, taken away. Harry must not be dependent on such things.

There are many of you my dear reviewers that I did not get a name with your review, so I answer below to your prompts:

I will not get too graphic-- I always believe that imagination compensates far more than words could when it comes to these things. It is sadistic, how Harry is injured, but adult abusers go the whole nine yards.

Harry is NOT Daredevil because 1-- I have not seen the movie yet and 2-- he is going to use normal senses, which is cooler. As for training outside of Hogwarts, there is no reason, as it is summer (thus empty of students). They do have a time limit though, till September. :)

Kaat Shadow Lover: what a delicious long review! *offers you cookie* Harry is not Daredevil, as I said, and as for Snape hating him, there may be tons of reasons from a transference to Harry of what he felt for James to envy for what he is. After all, Snape is the complete opposite, isn't he? He is, however, extremely reliable, yes yes. *grins*

TheLostPoet: too true, too true. *smiles* I try to stay as close to canon as possible.

Hummingfox: indeed! *chuckles* but we don't really know what House Dumbledore was, do we? Unless I overlooked it in the books. As for how this will reach Voldemort's ears and how much Snape's position will be compromised, that is for later chapters to reveal *s* I LOVE these long reviews! I crave them! They help me fine-tune the story!

Mikee: It definately won't be slash (even if that had been the case, Harry is just too young for Severus, and Severus is proud enough to stick to that rule of thumb, but in any case, they are both straight in this story). I will start with a Higgins-Eliza relationship (if you recall My Fair Lady). We'll see how it goes from there.

Lei Dumbledore: no DD thing, and here you go *third helping*

It is SNOWING! Weeeeeeeee! *shares mugs of hot chocolate before Snape's hearth* Come come, story's about to begin again hehe.

Before I start, I need to state some FAQs:

1. What Snape did to the Dursleys will be revealed in good time.
2. All the usual students and adults will make the scene in the story....
3. This story covers classes, quidditch and Voldemort's escapades.
4. PLEASE bear with the necessary unrolling of the story-- I can't jump ahead without ruining it! And PLEASE keep commenting-- it helps me fine tune the story and brush it up as I go.
5. Harry is purposefully less tolerant and easygoing than usual for two reasons: A. his world has crumbled all over again, only this time it's the world he LOVES that is threatened (as opposed to when he was a muggle-turned-wizard). B. Just hearing Snape instead of both hearing AND listening to him is far less threatening. *LMAO*
6. PLEASE trust me that Harry will return to canon asap. I won't twist the boy into oblivion.

With this out of the way, let the story begin. Chapter 4. *hits play*

Snape looked over his shoulder to find, unsurprised, that Harry was not following him. He stopped at the infirmary entrance, and turned around. Poppy was holding Harry's hand to lead him out of the infirmary.

"No, Poppy."

"But, Severus--"

"Your protests to the Headmaster. Kindly leave Potter alone, and if you can't bear to watch, go away." he said dryly and the matron huffed and left altogether, no doubt to take up on Snape's advice and talk to Dumbledore.

Harry was left standing on his own in the middle of the aisle formed by the beds, head bent downwards, eyelashes wet and lips pursed together tightly in a thin line. His hands were balled into fists, and he was bracing. But what Snape could feel radiating from the boy was an immense fear-- fear of the unknown. At the moment, Harry Potter was standing in the middle of pitch black chaos with no way to claw his way to safety.

"One foot in front of the other, Potter. I am sure you know how to walk, still," Snape said but this time he made his voice much softer, less intimidating. Harry snorted.

"I would hate to disappoint you by stumbling, Professor." Harry's voice dripped with sarcasm equalling Snape's. It was obvious what he was saying: he just did not trust the Potions Master, and after the past week he was far too strained to even care to restrain his impulse to voice that opinion.

"There is no way to disappoint me, Potter-- I expect you to underperform anyway. Now walk toward the sound of my voice. There are no obstacles ahead of you."

Harry clenched his teeth, and spread one hand in front of him, slightly bent, and another to the side. Snape appreciated the boy's caution. Shuffling his feet, slowly, gradually, Harry advanced a few paces, then stopped. Snape clicked his tongue impatiently.

"Well? You still aren't there."

Harry swallowed tensely as he started walking in that awkward elderly fashion again, his hand groping forward. He needed to hear Snape's voice, like a beacon in midnight-- even if that beacon was not entirely welcome. But just as he was able now to voice his frustration, he was completely muted when it came to his wishes.

The boy jumped when suddenly his hand was gripped by another, firmly and soundly. It both startled and relieved him.

"You made it Potter." Snape sneered as if he found it amusing that he managed. "Now all you have to do is follow me to your new room."

You will follow the sound of my footsteps or my voice. There are no unusual obstacles, and I will warn you of stairs." the Potions Master fired off instructions as he started to walk into the aisle already. Harry wanted to follow, for if the rejecting voice of Severus Snape faded, then Harry would be stranded in the black desert of sightlessness with no way of orientation. He took a step out of the familiar, sterile infirmary air.

Snape was so satisfied that Potter would follow him just like he did in the infirmary, that he briskly walked a few steps loudly into the aisle. He turned and waited for the boy to follow. To his surprise, the moment Harry stepped out of the infirmary, he froze like he was caught in headlights. He swallowed, his hands swaying haphazardly around him, and he blinked many times over.

"Over here, Potter. Walk towards me." Snape called out, frowning. The boy had not reacted this way while still in the infirmary. Harry seemed to attempt one shuffling, shaky step, but then he pulled his foot back and shook his head quickly, erratically.

"I- I can't. I can't do this."

"Of course you can, idiot boy! Follow my voice. There is nothing but air in this aisle!"

"I ... where are you?"

"To your left, hear my voice, now one foot--"

"I CAN'T DO THIS! Get away from me! I want to sit! I can't walk alone! I need help! HELP!" Harry backstepped, his eyes wide, his head tilted upwards as if being underwater and trying to reach the surface.

Snape growled and advanced, and Harry tried to jerkily backstep even more. His heel caught in the doorway's side and he stumbled, falling square on his behind, where he stayed trembling and continuing to make hacking sounds with his breathing.

When Snape bent to pick the boy up, fuming with irritation with what in his opinion was an uncalled for antic, Harry flinched. The sharp change in air pressure made his body react in terror, his hands flying upwards to protect his head. It had always been in the darkness that he was being beaten, and it was always impossible to see where the blow would land.

Snape was startled. I pushed too hard. The cowering image of the panicky boy, his eyes unseeing but haunted with recent memories reminded him the cupboard, the blood, the smell... and he took action. Firmly yet gently, he caught the boy's wrists and took them down from the level of his face.

"Never believe that I would hit a child, Potter-- not even you." he said in a cold voice. He hadn't meant to make it cold, not was the coldness directed at Potter for once. But still the boy shuddered and flinched. Snape clicked his tongue irritably, but for the first time, he felt compassion. It was similar to the compassion he felt for victims he could not help, for those that were left behind that he could not support.

But at the moment there was no Voldemort nor any of his lackeys around. There was no reason not to help the trembling, broken child before him.

Except that he was Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived.

He snorted as he picked up Harry, who gasped in surprise as well as the sensation of being lifted off the ground in a gentle, caring fashion rather than like a sack of potatoes only to be re-dropped.

"What are you going to do to me?" he asked timidly. Snape almost laughed.

"Merlin boy-- how could you ever face Voldemort with that rabbit heart you have? You refuse to walk. Much as I would love to leave you trembling on the floor like discarded jello, I do believe that is out of the question. So I am taking you to your room." he said calmly.

Harry was silent during the time Snape carried him to his room. Snape did not attempt to break the silence. He was far too pre-occupied with thoughts. He had almost overdone it today. He should have known better. He should have been more methodical. You don't just throw all the ingredients of a potion in and expect it not to blow up. Stupid, stupid man. Method. He had to even out the beginning, and press Potter on later.

Harry felt the change in the air when they entered the room. It was warmer and welcoming, permeated with a warm, subtle honeycomb and sugary smell. The small wafts of warm current urged Harry to relax; and perhaps he would once the stern Potions Master set him down. Which he did promptly. His hands gently made him face more towards the right and held him there fast.

"We are now standing at the entrance of your room. There is a large window to your right. The bed is right ahead of you and on the left is a desk and chair, and the door to the bathroom. Did you get all that or do I need to repeat myself?" the Potions Master's voice was more tolerant than before, although it was guarded and ready to instantly become aggressive. Harry nodded quickly. There was a pregnant pause, and the hands detached themselves from Harry's shoulders. Harry started to feel the same uncertainty creeping into him now that nobody sighted was controlling his orientation.

"You will probably have noticed that you don't yet have your wand." Snape's voice from behind him stated. Harry hadn't even looked for the thing until now. Snape continued. "I am keeping it for the time being. I will give it back to you when you manage to orient yourself and walk in this room unheeded, and when you learn to walk towards places on the basis of sound. You must learn to be dependent only on your own self, and on nothing that can be taken away from you."

Harry swallowed, feelings of worthlessness overwhelming him now that the enormity of what he had to achieve sank in. He would have to relearn everything, even the tiniest little things, and yet anyone with sight, even if less than perfect would be superior to him.

"What is the use now? There is nothing I can do. There is nothing I knew how to do that I can do now. I wouldn't be able to point my wand straight, let alone face anything and anyone."

Now, Snape felt himself in front of a crossroads. What he would answer the boy was of terrible importance, his instinct told him. How much of his own ambition of what he could train Harry to do was it prudent to reveal without risk of overwhelming the boy, making him react like he had only minutes before?

He turned Harry to face him. The green eyes stared through some point in his chest, then his forehead as Snape lowered in front of the boy. He placed Harry's hand on his shoulder so that he would know that he was currently on the same level as him. Harry blinked, his expression mute, unsure what to expect.

"Listen to me, Potter. I will only say this once, so you'd better pay attention. At the moment, you are correct; there is nothing you can do of what you used to, and you are weak and vulnerable to anyone the way you are," he started in a neutral, controlled voice. Regarding Snape, that tone was the most positive it had ever been when directed to Harry Potter, or anyone for that matter. Harry's shoulders slumped in stoic acceptance of his fate. Snape could see the boy ready to crumble into the bottomless pit. Snape bit his lip. Now for the uplift, the lifeline on which the boy would grasp.

"However, this is only very, -very- temporary situation if you so wish it." he said in a low tone, almost whispering voice that stroked at Harry's ears and promised unreachable dreams. "There are ways in which you can become as competent as you were before in all facets of your life; with work and diligence, you can rise above this. Do not doubt my words," he said seeing the shadow of disbelief wash over the boy's face, "because if I, Severus Snape, Potions Master and dedicated nemesis of Harry Potter find it worthwhile to invest my time and energy in a now-blind Harry Potter, then I must have seen something there, if not anything." he set a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder for fractions of a second, then got up again. Harry's expression was impassive. It held so many emotions that Snape was unable to read any single one of them.

Snape retreated towards the door again, then paused and said in his usual, 'take dictation' tone: "Everything in this room is enchanted to make a ringing sound. When you want to move around in the room, you just say clearly 'Orei' and the place or item you wish to go to, and it will ring until you are there. Try it once, to make sure it works."

There was a pause again, and Snape was afraid that Harry would not respond and would continue standing there, but after the longest, the boy about turned to face the inside of the room again, and said in a shaky voice "Orei Bed."

The slight chime sound gently sounded. Snape watched as Harry walked in his awkward, shuffling manner with hands outstretched towards the sound. It took him 3 minutes approximately to home in on the bed, but he went there. Snape nodded when the chime stopped and about turned to go.

"Professor?" Harry's voice was calmer, yet still overflowing with turbulent emotions.

"Yes?"

"What colour is my room?" he asked quickly and rather quietly, to avoid the breaking of his voice from being entirely obvious. Snape smirked.

"Red and Gold, Potter. Red and gold."

venus4280: *shudders with delight at the big review* wonderful, wonderful! Snape I think is in generally a little too harsh (after all, remember what he told Hermione when her teeth were too big?), but he will adjust, as this is as much a learning experience for him as it is for Harry. As for Harry himself, I do believe that this situation is slightly more dramatic than his usual predicament, if not anything for the fact that he cannot escape his troubles with the start of september. But every shock eventually wears off. Bear with me for a few chapters, alright? As for Snape, he isn't certain if Harry is in pieces or not yet. He is still pushing buttons and sees what happens.

Rickman's Girl: Full Circle will be updated tomorrow most probably. I got two versions in my head and I have yet to decide which path of the fork to take.

Fox690: *chuckles* Love is about to come, in large helpings I assure you. As for others in the staff, Sybil is there, and the rest are about to come very VERY soon.

Hummingfox: *bows* thank you. I try to offer to others what I would like to be offered myself. Wandless magic is yet a strictly hush-hush issue. But Harry isn't getting anything remotely as a wand before he can trust and gain some self-confidence without it. As for quidditch, wait and see :)

white owl: *Snape bows this time* he is flattered, he says. As a matter of fact this was a quasi-session as Harry couldn't quite take it just yet. Proper session #1 is yet to come. I dare say that if I manage to pull off what I got in mind, it should be somewhat interesting. As for Harry, I agree (am too much of a shrink not to). But in the same time someone has also got to get through to Snape. hehe.

kateydidn't: I couldn't agree with you more. Harry DOES need loving support as well as the toughening up that Severus can provide. Which is what Sev just realised. Hold till chapter 5. *chuckles* As for his visions, I will also stay silent-- but I will give you a cookie still. ;)

Mikee: Well, his duties as of yet are safe. As for his relationship with Harry, if you read anything else I have written I dare say that it would take an effort not to... well not have them be at opposite camps at least.

two2blue: Neither Harry nor Sev have had the time to let that catch up to them just yet... all in good time.

KaatShadowLover: I am not familiar with DD, although I recall seeing some cartoon with the guy. He is supposed to be a lawyer or doc, right? Or was that Thor? Anyhow, I am not aiming for a super-hero Harry-- but for a very charismatic one. The POVs are rather intertwined with each paragraph, subtly perhaps. It will be mostly Severus simply because I have not (thank goodness) experienced

blindness, and therefore am safer describing it from the outside. I am working with case-studies, not actual experiences. I need no bribes, your reviews fuel me. :)

Dark Angemon: Thank you. I am glad you see it my way. It is ooc for Harry -yet-. But he'll come around soon enough.

Angel Baby: hehe, this IS a Harry Potter fanfic. YOu can't keep the Potter charm is an important matter, but my lips are sealed. As for what senses he'll use, again, I can't say. *chuckles*

t.a.g.: I think the rephrasal of that question would be: How long will it take Harry to start living with his blindness? He is an adjustable kid.
L

Melissa Lupin: Really? then any pointers as to things that are necessary to go through would be most welcome.

The weather is crazy here, but it is rather spectacular. Snow, drizzle, snow, sunshine, snow. It is vaguely like the moodswings of our lovely, charming potions master. Heh. *Severus glares*

Thank you for your unlimited support! It is very heartwarming. I tremble now that I might disappoint you all with each new chapter... oy. If I do so, tell me... if I do not, tell me again. It is very important to me. As always, responses to reviews are below.

Today featuring: Introduction of new character #1... *drumroll, flourish*

hits play

Snape muttered 'cheese cake parfait' and swooped past the gargoyle and into Dumbledore's office.

"Albus, this is ridiculous."

"What is, Severus? Do sit down." the headmaster's eyes twinkled and offered the disgruntled man a seat. Snape sat down at the very edge of it. Before he had a chance to speak, Dumbledore asked cheerfully: "Lemon drop?"

"Merlin, no, Albus! Look, the boy is not ready."

"Of course he is, Sev-"

"You are not LISTENING! The boy is not ready for me. He needs things that I cannot offer him, but he must have."

"And what might those be?" Albus blew on his tea calmly.

"Support, Albus! Someone with the tolerance for the boy's irritating sniffing and self-pity! Someone that will not want to wrap his fingers around his neck and snap it every time he panics at the face of the unknown. I am not that man, Albus!" Severus was leaning forward, a deep crease between the heavy dark eyebrows that cast heavy shadows on the already abysmal eyes of the potions master. It was an eerie glance, engaging and inescapable as a black hole to a beam

of light. Albus smiled faintly, eyes challenging and yet accepting in the same time.

"You are telling me you need help, Severus?"

Snape sat back in the chair and his jaw clenched, as well as his fingers around the teacup he had previously refused. He glared at the headmaster that had already had the superiority of someone that had won. Did he admit his weakness to the aging wizard, and receive some relief of the task that was not ominously weighing on his shoulders, or did he proudly refuse it with one of his coldest sneers and probably destroy the boy more effectively than Voldemort himself?

Snape sneered. Coldly. "It is not I that need help, Albus. It is the boy that needs it badly, from more than one person. Preferably from someone more touchy-feely, less effective in getting work done."

Dumbledore chuckled under his beard at the desperate way Snape was trying to keep both his dignity and attain his much-needed help. He decided to let Snape believe that he did not see through his mannerism.

"That is fortunate then, and it solves the problem of finding a new DADA professor." he said cheerfully again, watching amusedly Snape's visage shift from guardedness to instant relief to great horror as he realised.

"Albus, not the--"

He was cut off by the door opening, and a relatively dishevelled, pale, red-rimmed and distraught Remus Lupin entered. Silence reigned as the three wizards looked at each other. Remus was trembling.

"Tell me it is not true, Headmaster..." he asked in a hushed, shocked voice.

Snape snorted.

"Unfortunately Lupin, the boy truly is as blind as a bat. But hey, that's what got you back here." he added offhandedly, glaring murder at Dumbledore that had made him go through the whole process of asking for help when already Lupin had been called.

Remus' face hardened at the blow of Snape's chilly words and made a step as if to attack the sneering Potions Master, but then restrained himself and ran a hand through his hair. He chose to ignore Snape, much to the former's irritation. Instead he turned to the headmaster.

"I will do whatever it takes to help, of course." he said in the same hushed, hurt voice.

"Thank you Remus. I knew you would. Harry's new educational and adjustment needs have been assigned to Severus here, who will teach him. He will tell you what sort of assistance he needs from you." Dumbledore said, phrasing his words carefully so that both wizards on the other side of his desk would not rebel to the idea of collaboration.

Lupin's jaw dropped in surprise, and in his face the obvious question of 'why Snape?' was drawn. Snape smirked to himself in grim amusement as he got up, and dusted imaginary crumbs from his robe.

"If you are done staring like the village idiot, Lupin, follow me." he said haughtily and walked outside with the stance of a king. He had already walked through half the hall when Remus caught up to him. What he said with the headmaster Snape did not know, but he could imagine. It amused and gratified him, that he was still preferred for the task over Lupin who had been a far more obvious choice for the boy's rehabilitation. It was a good part of the reason why he would work with the werewolf again, and brew his wolfsbane all over again, and tolerate him for yet another school year.

Lupin was going to listen to him, and he was capable of offering what he had trouble finding in his heart.

"The situation is as follows, Lupin: Potter is blind. The only thing he can see is darkness. There is no hope of ever regaining back his

sight. What we have to do here is train him and strengthen him so that he will still be able to face Voldemort when the time comes."

Lupin breathed.

"How was he blinded, Severus?"

Something in the shorter wizard's words made Severus side look at him, and he snorted.

"Much as I would have craved the honour, Potter does not owe his sightlessness to anything I have done. It was done the muggle, violent way."

Lupin gasped.

"The Dursleys? ...but how? how could they?"

Snape's face was stony and grim as he muttered in a way that chilled Remus to the bone and made his heart ache, and not just for Harry:

"It is not difficult to vent your frustration on a helpless, defenseless child, especially when you are his guardian."

Remus swallowed and asked after a pause.

"How is he faring?"

It was now Snape's turn to sigh.

"He is capable of adjusting with such speed that surprises even me. He can already react to changes in air pressure, and he was clever enough to use wandless magic to find his clothes. He can go a very long way in very little time."

Remus stared at the hard profile of the Potions Master, the slight fluctuations of the man's voice, the way he phrased things, making him faintly, very faintly see why perhaps Dumbledore had chosen that socially misadjusted bat for Harry. He asked gently.

"...but?"

"But he is afraid. He is afraid of everything and everyone, and harsh words or taunting will not effectively get it out of him, not with the time limits that we have. He has to be well-trained by September." Snape said in a matter-of-fact, unemotional, formal voice. He took in a breath. "He needs to be convinced that this is something within his grasp, Lupin. I dare say you can teach him that."

"I'll try, Severus."

Snape rounded up on Remus suddenly, his eyes blazing dark fire.

"You will not just 'try', Lupin. It is not just the boy's life that is at stake here-- it is the fate of the whole wizarding world. I will not have my painstaking work, my risktaking go out the window because a drunkard smashed mirrors and windows with the Golden Boy's head, understand?"

The tirade did not all go to waste, but Remus was already steeling himself for seeing Harry, and paid little attention to the gist of the potions master's lecture. He passed his hand over his face and through his hair again. Snape backed off and said with a hint of disgust.

"Before you go to his room, wipe that rediculously miserable expression from your face-- and don't let Potter hear despair in your voice. Merlin knows he is already wallowing in enough of it. Make sure he's ready in two days. That's the most I can give you."

Remus nodded. As he took a deep breath, Snape directed him to where Harry's rooms were.

Harry was sitting in his bed, curled up like a cat in what he felt was a warm patch of sunlight falling, no doubt, through the window. He indifferently stroked the coverlet, feeling the velvety, slightly patterned bedcover. He tensed and paused, receiving information from his fingers he never anticipated.

There was a depression in the weaving of the fabric, like a road through a forest of fuzziness.

He could feel the harder wool streaming ahead of him like a highway and his heart picked up beats. His fingers eagerly traced the weaving lines, trying to discern the pattern that surely must be there. His whole consciousness went at the tiny bit of skin at the very tip of his fingers, travelling the rollercoaster ride of spirals, wavy lines, circles intertwining. Discerning the pattern became suddenly more important a task than defeating Voldemort himself. Swallowing, he very carefully slid off the bed so his knees would be on the floor and all of the bed surface would be free for the perusal of his fingers.

Hungrily, quickly, his fingertips laid out for him a whole network of lines and spheres and spirals, as if a golden line was tracing them in the eternal darkness surrounding him. To Harry, this was true, pure magic. He watched with the eyes of his mind as his fingers told him what they were seeing, and he smiled thinly, uncertainly, upon completing the whole pattern. Had he really guessed right? Had he really managed to discover something on his own?

He jumped at the faint sound of the door sweeping across the carpet. What would Snape say, seeing him kneeling against the bed like this, playing with a cover?

"Oh, Harry...!"

It was a very different, lightyears more loving voice than Snape's, and it poured soothing warmth in a very cold, barren place in his soul. He ran to the voice, and hugged the warm, soft body. He smiled, tearing up in release feeling the protecting hands close around him and keep him safe, no matter what. Everything seemed better now--even the blackness that he would now live in did not seem so morbid. He felt Remus' hands brush over his face, cupping it gently. He shivered in fear. What would he hear now? What expression was the DADA professor wearing now?

Harry had no hope of knowing unless he spoke. He said timidly, in a hoarse voice.

"...Remus?"

"You have grown so nicely, Harry, I am so proud." Remus' warm voice uplifted his heart and he smiled, hugging the older wizard once more and saying with a biting voice.

"I... you know I... I can't see you, Remus, --"

"You will be able to, Harry, with better vision than many people will ever hope of having." Remus' hands were stroking his hair soothingly. This was more like it. This actually made him feel a little less desperate, a little less suicidal.

And then it hit him and he gasped. He felt Remus tense in concern.

"Harry?"

"Did... did I just... run to you?"

Harry thought he could almost picture the smile that would go with that voice.

"That you did, Harry. You followed my voice?"

Harry didn't answer. He needed to doublecheck, and doublecheck right now.

"Is... is the pattern on my bedcover a pot of lillies and daisies?"

Remus did not know whether to weep or laugh or marvel at the fountain of strength just a little show of acceptance, of love could produce in the boy.

"That it is, Harry. Right on."

Harry smiled even more and hugged Remus tightly again.

Perhaps he could do this.

There you go! After darkness, there is dawn... somewhat. *L* it is definately not over yet.

Snape wafts to the left of the hearth to retrieve a brandy glass

smiles at readers well, that's a start at least. Now to climb up the mountain! Next chapter: lesson #1 and *drumroll* Moldie Vort! You think he's been sleeping all this time? *L*

As for your wonderful reviews:

Melissa Lupin: That sounds like a great idea, but I will leave you to write it! go on then! *hehe* seeing auras I think would distract Harry from becoming what I have in mind for him to become though. But still, do write that! That is a good plot bunny! I do need a Beta *L* if you want to take the position, feel free *L*

Lirael: I am glad you can see it that way. And no, this is not a Harry/Snape story. The best chance of any romance being in it is Ron/Hermione. After all, nobody else has the luxury of thinking romance. *L*

t.a.g.: Yeah. And considering how -rare- Snape pep-talks are....

LegacyLady: *bows* thank you so very much. It is fun to write! And not too hard yet. What I am worried is how his development will come across. I want him to still seem in character to canon with the circumstances he will face... oh well. We'll see. And yes, part of the depression IS to contrast the strength of will Harry will show.

Darkhorse: Sirius will be notified of his godson's situation shortly. mwe heh.

Kaat Shadow Lover: *accept bday cake and wolfs it down* I do have a sweet tooth heh. I promise you, that I will not deprive you of the pleasure of a flashback concerning Snape and Vernon's little tete-a-tete. hehe. As for Harry and his rathr quick progress, I want to justify the fact that he is who he is... I need to show that although he can reach an all time low and come very close to shattering, he is made of tougher steel... and so is a match for moldy vort. hehe.

Angel Baby: here you go! I hope you didn't gag too much on the honey. hehe.

Hummingfox: There are a lot of things Harry has to realise, and he will, but at the moment he is still under shock, and he still has not let a lot of emotions surface-- thus he can't afford to realise much. Don't worry. Snape will help. *evil grin from Snape* hehe. As for how this ride from darkness to dawn in Harry's life... well I LIKE emotions. I like drawing them, I like depicting them... you'll be the judge of what the ride was in the end, though.

bramblerose: *spanks bot* bad bot, bad! eating my reviews! Of COURSE I am bringing Harry back in his gryffindor charming self-- or if I did not, then Snape would not have been effective in his task, and he would hex me senseless. heh. As for Snape leaving Harry like that in the infirmary, he didn't -think- he was leaving him like that. *chuckles* he has the tendency to jump ahead at the first sign of potential-- which is a reason why class frustrates him so. He also does have a thing for distressing Harry, and that he can't help. Yet anyway hehe.

Phoenix Tears Type 6: *is scared* I hope I don't let you guys down with my Snape. You are making me nervous! *chuckles*

Karen: Thank you! I think there are hints even in the book. I mean, when Ginny was taken in the chamber, he is described as clutching the chair tightly. That, for a person like Snape counts as a significant reaction, methinks.

Elendil Snape: here you are! Peoples' happiness is my lifetime goal.

Tinuviel: *Snape smirks quizzically* I ... wouldn't be too sure, with him as a teacher. heh.

Mikee: By mere law of exposure to one another, they will stop being allergic to each other. Further than that, only time will tell. :)

Jaimynsfire: Well, I bet Harry will fight to keep what he has tooth and nail-- now that he is starting to suspect that he perhaps can give a fight for it. hehe. *offers you an Arthur plushie*

yawns, Snape hands her 'quick wake up' potion Hey all! It's Saturday. I am sure you all know that. *Snape glares at her as she yawns again* He is jumpy, it's his first Harry session today. hehe.

oookay. *cracks knuckles, Snape prepares brandy, fire roars, weather snows* everything seems ready.

To those that feel Harry's progress is at breakneck speed: you are right, it is! He he is a wizard, and not just any wizard... hehe. Don't worry though. It is not going to be all that quick.

Chapter 6. *hits play*

Two days later, Snape was surprised to see Lupin walk into the main hall with a Harry Potter that did resemble the usual, insufferable brat instead of a broken shadow of what had been. He clenched his teeth and bend over his tea again. How could the werewolf do it? How was he a natural at something that Snape staggered? It annoyed him to no end, and increased his rather foul mood. He was worried. There had no been much of a call or summons from Voldemort in almost half a month. It was not yet a time span to imply that anything was amiss, yet Snape still felt queasy. He watched as Lupin walked normally, almost non-chalantly, and Harry followed, his head rather unmoving, tilted to the side as he was listening, and his eyes still, yet brilliant.

The boy seemed stronger in spirit. The body would soon follow if that was true.

"Goodmorning, Severus." Lupin said. He looked like he had not slept the past two days. Snape did not sympathise. It was standard practice with the Potions Master, and he felt he had far too many fish to fry, and a small pan to fry them with.

"If you say so." he muttered and looked at Harry. "How do you feel about walking and sounds, Potter?"

Harry shifted. Remus had made the whole process of adjusting to orientation by sound a game. He had tied Harry's eyes with a blindfold, as if playing children's games, and then had urged Harry to

grope around, to find stuff, and then to find the DADA professor. It had been difficult at first, and he was afraid of stumbling against furniture, but after the first 20 or so times of bruising his knees it did not matter anymore, not did a bump seem threatening. It was easier with the blindfold, at first. It gave Harry the illusion of being voluntarily deprived of sight, and that by loosening the cloth he'd be able to see around him again.

It was late in the previous night that at last he had memorised his room well enough not to bump into things, and his ears seemed to pick out even the tiniest of sounds, easily pinpointing their source in his mental map of the room, like a shadowy representation of the marauder's map in his head.

Harry had almost been confident, but something had happened this morning that had checked his speed.

He had frozen again when he stepped out of his room. He had needed Remus' quiet soothing, and his support to resist the need to run back into his now-familiar surroundings, in his sanctuary where he did not need his sight.

It was only his trust that Remus would not let harm come to him that had offered him a hold on his emotions. They had retreated to an acidic pool at the base of his stomach by the time they had reached the Main Hall. He felt that he could hear too well. Bird chirping, furniture creaking, echo, window rattling... His heart was beating fast, his mind working overtime to discern the influx of auditory stimuli and focus on the footsteps and robe swishing of Remus Lupin. In the end he was almost wishing that every goddamn bird in the sky would drop dead. How would he ever survive with all this noise in his head? His mind was staggering.

"I asked you a question, Potter. Grace us with an answer, boy." Snape's voice snapped at him. He flinched, more because the word 'boy' reminded him of people perhaps worse than Snape than anything else. At least one plus in his whole predicament was that he was spared Snape's image. And Snape's voice was not so threatening when not accompanied with one of his deadly glares.

"We will see, professor." he said sardonically. It was ironic for him to use that verb perhaps, but he liked it.

Snape scowled and glanced at Lupin. He was looking strained yet rather optimistic. And much as it chagrined Snape to even think to himself, he trusted Lupin's evaluations. He nodded.

"Have you had any breakfast?"

Harry shook his head.

"No professor."

"Good. Follow me. Lupin, stay here."

The last order that Snape bossily fired off made Harry's glass, fragile sense of well being crumble again. What would happen to him with just Professor Snape there and nobody else to put a break on the man when Harry would not be able to follow or cope?

"Severus, why don't--"

"No. You'll distract the boy. Come and get him in a couple of hours."

Harry took in a shaky breath. Remus' hand clasped his shoulder, and the raggedy professor whispered in his ear:

"Don't worry Harry. You can do this. I wouldn't leave you alone if I didn't think so."

Harry swallowed nervously. Remus added, almost too low to hear, but still crystal to Harry's now-sensitized ears: "I believe in you, and so does Snape, even if he won't admit it."

The image of Snape in black pon pons and cheerleader's skirt was amusing enough to make Harry smile and nod.

By the look of Harry's face, Snape was positive that whatever the boy was thinking it was not something he would appreciate. He gritted his teeth and got up.

"Follow me, Potter. When I stop, you stop. When I move, you move. I will warn you of stairs and turns. The rest you are more than capable of figuring out on your own."

"Yes, sir." Harry hissed. He felt that the Potions Master was an easy trigger for his frustration. But Remus believed in him. He saw worth in him, and perhaps so did others. Harry would not disappoint them before he had given it his all, even if that meant the Potions Master and his snide remarks.

The walk towards the classroom Snape wanted to go to was very eventful. At first, Harry kept bumping into the Potions Master when he stopped abruptly, earning himself a downputting remark of 'clumsy, Potter. Clumsy.'. However he was able to follow the man closely and he only bumped in two out of a total of 6 corners the Potions Master turned sharply-- after the second time he'd yelped, he decided to use his hand to trace the wall as he walked.

Snape glanced over his shoulder and smiled momentarily to himself. How much was the distance this boy could go if he was adjusting so fast and so easily? It was mind boggling, even to him. He made an effort to make sure his voice would be indifferent when he finally reached the doorway of the old, now unused classroom.

"We're here, Potter."

"Where is here, Professor?" Harry asked rather acidly, but he was beginning to get a grip on his manners just as he was beginning to somehow get a grip on his sense of control.

"West wing, third floor, first door to the right. Now you know, now you come here every day on your own."

"But--"

"Merlin Potter. You have been roaming this castle far more than any other pupil. You know this place just as well as anyone. Trust your instincts and stop being so tiresome in your display of uneasiness." Snape said irritably as he opened the door and ushered Harry inside.

The room smelled musty, dust tickled Harry's nostrils. Although he couldn't realise why, he had the sense that the ceiling was high above his head, and that the room was quite large. Then he realised why he was under the impression. The Potions Master's footsteps were echoing very slightly, implying the size of the room. Harry smiled to himself. This was getting easier fast.

"The first essential thing that you have to learn Potter, is to be aware of things happening around you. The moment I am satisfied that you can do that, you will have your wand back and we will start on the really important things."

Harry had been bristling, but at the thought of getting his wand back and thus having more substantial help, everything was washed away. He heard the Potions Master come up to him.

"Hold this." he pressed what seemed a furry ball with a bell in it.

"A dog's chew toy?" Harry said in disbelief after fingering it for a while.

"Correct." Snape snatched it from Harry's hands and took a few steps backwards. He tossed it up and caught it again. "Did you hear that?"

"Of course." Harry said a little irritably.

"Good." Snape said and suddenly he threw the ball squarely at Harry, and hit him squarely in the chest with it. Harry scowled and jumped, startled.

"What was that for?" he snapped. Snape smirked and called the ball back to him.

"Avoid it, Potter. Hear it coming, and avoid it. Up to then, I'll target practice."

Harry was dazed. How was he to dodge a flying object?

Ring pock.

The ball hit him at the chest again.

"Accio ball." Snape's relentless voice.

Harry had opened his mouth to protest when

Rring pock.

The ball hit him again. And again. And again.

Rring pock.

Against his chest,

Rring pock,

against his torso,

Rring pock

against his legs. Snape was having fun, Harry was getting angrier and angrier.

"Much as the shades you are taking are lovely Potter, you are not getting out of this unless you make some effort of dodging it. Hear the ring, and move away from the sound. Move away so that the sound will pass you by."

Rring pock.

This time the ball hit Harry in the face. That was it. This would not continue.

Snape knew that Potter was wound up to dangerous levels. But then again, he wanted Harry to be so mad that he would perhaps disregard the obvious and act as if he had no hinderance. He threw the ball again.

Rrrrrrrring.....

The boy had sidestepped.

"Finally, Potter."

But Harry was not finished.

"Accio ball!" the ball obediently came to his hand and he threw it towards where he heard Snape's voice.

It missed, of course, but Snape liked the fact that Harry had reacted this way. Or at least, he did in the first few seconds. Then he realised that the boy wanted to hit him and that did not sit well with him.

"Excellent Potter. Now keep dodging." he growled and conjured up a couple more balls.

When approaching the old classroom, Remus' lupine hearing picked out growling, rings, bounces and thuds. It sounded like there was a full fledged duel going on in there, and his heart leaped to his throat as he rushed in, only to be hit squarely in the forehead with what seemed to be a rubber ringing ball. He blinked in surprise.

Harry was sweating, hair in his face, eyes blazing in anger that was even more prominent because they were so unmoving. Snape was also sweating, tossing about 3 balls at the boy and calling them magically back like a lunatic.

That was not what amazed, Remus. What amazed him was that Harry was making every effort of dodging, avoiding. And while he was mostly hit with the balls, he did dodge a few. And Remus was sure that that number would increase.

Once a seeker, always a seeker, James Potter's voice said laughingly in Remus' head, from memories of happier times.

"Session is over. Tomorrow, here, Potter. 9 sharp. Don't make me come and get you." Snape snapped and stormed out of the room, leaving a livid Harry to the soothing care of Remus, who was in all

accounts rather itching to try to throw a ball to Harry himself and see what happens.

Snape walked in the dungeons, throwing his cloak on an armchair in his personal quarters. He was tired, and scowling. He poured himself a glass of brandy, to ponder on Harry's behavior and responses, and whether he should be feeling a little soothed in his worry for the September deadline.

He did not have the chance. The brandy glass smashed at his feet as his hand jolted.

The Dark Mark was calling, and Snape had no choice but to go. He put on his death eater outfit, holstered his wand, sent an unconscious plea to whoever was watching, and walked to the edge of Hogwarts, and Apparated.

"The moment is arriving, my faithful Death Eaters, that all shall be finally as it should. The traitor is caught." Voldemort announced in his calm, triumphant and chilling voice. Snape's heart skipped beats. Was he going to be executed?

Two masked Death Eaters brought in a limp figure. Snape felt both relief and sickness wash over him. He was not the traitor in question.

Igor Karkaroff was.

Snape sincerely hoped the man was already dead.

He was not.

"Please, my Lord," the man sniffled, his face already bloody, his one hand already mangled. "have mercy."

Snape shut his eyes. Of all the things to tell Voldemort, mentioning 'mercy' was the best way not to get any.

Voldemort walked up to Karkaroff and stroked the man's cheek with long, fleshless fingers.

"I will show mercy, Igor..." he said as he swished and flicked, and the man was hurled upwards. Tom Riddle grinned horribly. "...eventually."

And somewhere in Hogwarts castle, Harry Potter sat up in bed and screamed.

Heh. Here it is! I hope it has not been too tiring? I am going fast with Harry yet, but I will slow down quickly. Please don't hit me about his quick progress.

As for my reviewers:

shitsumon: McGonagall will of course make her appearance. I plan to involve everyone that is usually part of Harry's life. You'll see *s*

Dark Angemon: I am not sure. I think that that at least is something not too hard to get in high levels... the sense of touch, I mean. YOU will find out what happened to the Dursleys when Harry starts wondering who rescued him. *L* in a couple of chapters.

Kaat Shadow Lover: hehe. I think Dumbledore puts up these passwords only to force Snape to say something silly.

blueyed-angel: I don't believe that in the books Harry would be so abused, but you have to admit that even the level he is abused is rather high. As for Vernon, perhaps he looks weak, and is, but not when faced with someone he considers weaker or helpless. I think.

Jaimynsfire: That's what DUMbledore's hoping, anyway hehe.

Angel Baby: aww. I'm sorry. *hands you a cookie*

Mikee: Well, I think their reactions are pretty predictable... we will see. Harry's birthday is coming up, and August is near, too.

Melissa Lupin: all is taken care of-- even his quidditch playing! Just bear with me. I hope this chapter was up to standard.

Lirael: I wanted to read a 'blind Harry/ helping Snape' fic that did not involve slash. I gave up and decided to write it on my own. *chuckles*

Greetings everyone! *Snape mutters something as he prepares the hearth* mmmm... *warms up deliciously before becoming functional again* So you want to know more?

Alrighty then. Hee hee.

Again, thank you for your reviews, ESPECIALLY the deliciously long ones, as well as the quick as a whiplash 'write soon or else' ones. I love them all, I cherish them and they indeed make me write faster! I think that much is obvious.

Snape rhe as he swirls the brandy tumbler

Anyhow, I'd better start before my... *looks at Snape* friend here blows up. heh.

Chapter 7. *hits play*

Remus didn't even understand how he ran across the corridor past Gryffindor tower and barged into Harry's room, terrified of what he might see. The cry had been bloodcurdling, and could be the result of many emotions.

He was somewhat relieved when he did not see anything involving blood or severe bodily harm. Of course the way Harry was clutching at his hair, rocking back and forth in his bed was not reassuring in the least. He did not make any sign that he had heard the DADA professor come in. Remus crossed to the bed in two big strides and embraced Harry in an effort to both support the boy and stop the rocking.

"What is it Harry? What happened?"

Harry did not answer still. His breath was coming in short bursts but he was not crying. He gripped the tufts he was clutching even harder, so much that Remus was afraid he'd detach them along with his scalp.

"Why is this happening to me? Why can't I just be left alone?" Harry muttered, pronouncing the words so fast that Remus had trouble catching them all in the faint whispers.

"Who won't leave you alone Harry? Tell me, and I will help you." Remus tried to get through to him, tugging at his shoulders just a little. Indeed, the rocking stopped, but at Harry's lips played a small wry, ironic half-smile that made Remus' skin crawl. It was the kind of mirthless, bitter smile that he had seen playing on Severus Snape's lips for so many times.

"You don't know what you are saying, Remus." Harry's voice sounded metallic, hard. What could possibly be that had made this happen?

"Was it a vision, Harry?" a soothing, steady voice startled both the boy and the professor. Dumbledore walked in, warily and set a hand on Harry's brittle shoulder. The mere touch of the older wizard seemed to help Harry cope. He swallowed and exhaled shakily, while he nodded.

Remus was at a loss.

"What vision?"

Dumbledore's voice had sadness vaster than any sea as he explained, all the while holding Harry's shoulder. The boy leaned in to the touch somewhat.

"Harry has had a link with Voldemort. He can see things that Voldemort does at times, in seemingly random intervals. I was... hoping that Harry would not have to be subjected to one of the visions so soon."

Remus paled, his heart stopping at the sheer horror of what this entailed. Harry was granted a few precious seconds of sight, but sight of malice and atrocities. Harry would always be reminded of what he lost, and never be able to enjoy the small intervals out of his dark world because horror would invade him.

Who in the world would be able to suffer this?

"He... has found Karkaroff. He.. just killed him." Harry's voice said, in his usual tones only breathless and hushed. In the brief pause only his erratic breath was heard. Remus made a movement as if to talk, but Dumbledore shook his head at him. Indeed, soon enough Harry spoke again.

"I could see everything... every little detail. I could see colours again... and light... and everything I desired.... or... actually no. I was forced to watch only what he wanted. I had to see every... everything. All that he did to Karkaroff, I watched. I hate him."

He said that word with such a low, menacing voice that Remus shivered. Dumbleore nodded.

"You have every right to, Harry. You shouldn't have to be obliged to feel this way. I apologise, my boy."

Harry just clenched his teeth. He wasn't sure if he was not mad at Dumbledore himself for this. Perhaps if he hadn't been with the Dursleys, perhaps if someone else had him, he wouldn't be blind now, and he wouldn't be granted his greatest wish in such a twisted, perversed way. Hell, even if Snape had been his guardian, he probably wouldn't end up blind. Twisted and in Slytherin, perhaps, but not blind, with only Voldemort's eyes as a window to the world.

"Whoever controls my life must be laughing pretty much now." Harry shrugged off Dumbledore's hand and sighed. The grim expression did not shift from his features, and Remus ached.

"Harry, you control your own life." Dumbledore said, "Because you control the way that you will handle each event. It is up to you if you will allow this terrible turn in your life break you or you will fight it and rise above it."

There was a long pause, and Remus saw that the young Gryffindor was rolling Dumbledore's words around in his head. He held Remus' forearm with a strong grip that somewhat surprised the professor. For a frail, weak and petite boy, Harry had quite a bit of strength.

"What good would that do?" he said reluctantly, broodingly.

Dumbledore smiled kindly, and gently patted Harry's back.

"Well, nobody would laugh anymore."

That cleared Harry's face, and the sharp lines smoothed out to be replaced by a determined expression and a spark in the unmoving eyes that made Remus want to worship Dumbledore. He truly was the greatest wizard.

Snape walked through the hearth in his room and dropped the white death-eater mask without care, glad to hear it clatter on the flagstone of the fireplace. Next he threw off his shoulders the heavy black hood and cloak with a tired, abhorrent shake of the shoulders. Then he turned to the fireplace and threw in a pinch of floo.

"Dumbledore."

The head of the elderly wizard showed almost immediately.

"Severus, you are back. Come through, please."

As soon as Snape walked through he stated with a grim voice what he thought would shock the headmaster.

"Igor Karkaroff was found and killed."

Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes, I am aware of that."

Snape frowned and blinked. He even forgot to be angry.

"Exactly how can you be aware of that, Albus?"

Dumbledore did not seem at all content that he had a piece of information to impress Snape with, although making the Potions Master show open surprise was a great rarity. He sighed.

"Harry told me."

"Potter!?" the forgotten anger started to easily be fueled by the constant irritation even the sound of the boy's name was. Dumbledore put a hand up, as his shoulders sagged just a tiny little bit, and Snape stopped, his fertile mind already making connections.

"He has been having visions of some sort, rendering him able to look through Voldemort's eyes. That's how I know."

Snape's expression was blank, but his eyes were unusually alive as he pondered on the new piece of information. In a less angry and more contemplative voice, he commented:

"It could be extra leverage. Voldemort does not know. It could even be used as proof of my fidelity to him."

Dumbledore sighed.

"Severus, you are missing my point."

Snape clicked his tongue.

"I am definately not missing your point, Albus. I know it is yet another reason to coddle poor Harry Potter and his interesting predicaments," drawled Snape, but he didn't put in his usual irony, and he didn't hold the headmaster's gaze as he would in other occassions when the subject 'Harry Potter' would come along.

Dumbledore shook his head and popped a lemon drop in his mouth. Snape furrowed his brow, rubbing the base of his nose.

"Has the boy retreated in some kind of autistic or catatonic shell or something?" he asked irritably, waiting his luck to make it so that Harry was little more than a breathing vegetable.

"On the contrary, I think he has a driving force strong enough to match yours," Dumbledore said with a small sad smile. Snape arched an eyebrow and smirked.

"You mean anger?"

The question was left unanswered, and Snape did not comment further.

It was coming close to Harry's birthday, but this time the young Gryffindor did not even notice, nor did he particularly think about festivities and cheerful occasions. Harry was for the first time able to understand how Hermione felt and what motivated her: a deep, burning desire to prove to yourself and other that not only you are not inferior to others, but in many aspects you are superior to them. Nobody will laugh. Dumbledore's kind words had succeeded where Snape and Remus had failed: They gave Harry a mission, a goal that he could see far ahead and would do anything to get there.

Not that the burning desire made anything easy in itself.

From the sessions with Snape, Harry had managed beautifully to listen to and dodge two rubber balls that the potions master hurled at him. He however completely lost it when number three entered into the fray. He just could not figure out how to keep track of all three almost identical ringing sounds, which frustrated him as much as it frustrated Snape, who was now expecting far more of the boy than before.

"Really Potter, only would think you completely deaf! What is it, can't your mind focus on three objects at once? Usually the human brain can handle up to 7!"

Harry would grit his teeth and wipe the sweat and just try and try and try, but even as he tried harder he failed even more, causing even more caustic remarks to come from the potions master.

And he still had not seen his wand. He would fantasize at solitary moments to what uses he would be able to put it in. For one thing, he wouldn't have to trace the wall to go to places. He would use a variant of the 'point me' spell to be led there, like his muggle counterparts used their walking sticks. He would also not need to dodge physically anything. Instead he would guard against it and then he'd hex his attacker (always bearing the sound of Severus Snape in his consciousness) to hell and back.

But to get back his wand, he'd have to dodge all three balls for a whole of 2 hours in that infernal classroom with Severus Snape. He groaned in extreme frustration and kicked at where he now knew that an armour was standing and relished in the loud sound it was making. When the clang subsided, he kicked it again, and again, and imagined that it was Snape and that he was helpless, begging for mercy. Hah.

"Harry? Particularly bad lesson?"

Harry stopped at the voice of Remus Lupin. He always felt somewhat ashamed of depicting the full extent of his aggressive feelings to the kind and easygoing man, because simply he felt that compared, Lupin had more to cope with. Of course he had his sight, and the hinderance of lycanthropy was only once a month, but it was more than a plight-- it was social stigma, something that deprived you of everything if people knew. In his case, the worst he could come to was cause other people's pity-- which he would prevent of course by showing he was anything but pitiful...

... eventually.

"I just can't seem to be able to do it. No matter how hard I try, I just can't dodge them all. And Snape keeps saying that he will not give me my wand before I manage to dodge all three. I mean, come ON. It was murder to manage two at a time, and he didn't even praise me for that. I wonder if HE can do what he demands ME to!" Harry breathed after his tirade and swallowed, running a hand through his hair, feeling the soft, wild texture of it. Lately he found that he liked textures-- they were fascinating, from an animal's fur or plumage to the very roughness of the stones in some of the walls of Hogwarts.

Harry's world was full of images again, but this time tactile ones, with high detail and dramatic reliefs. The desert he had felt a week ago was sprouting small oases even by the day. And he was certain that that would continue as soon as he could gain more mobility than the itinerary from the room to the classroom and back, and inside his room, where he knew where everything was.

He needed his stupid wand, that's what he needed. Not dodging stupid balls.

Remus thought about it and smiled.

"Let's walk together." he said and put Harry's hand on his elbow lightly. Harry was hesitant.

"Snape will be livid if he discovers you leading me anywhere."

Remus smirked, so that Harry would hear it and know what his expression was.

"I'll deal with Severus, this once, if the need arrives. Let me tell you a story as we walk."

Harry nodded and felt himself less tense than usually after a session when he was obliged to find his way back even counting the number of steps back to his room. Remus' cool, calm voice was refreshing, coming in sharp contrast with the unharboring one that was coaching him.

"When we were around your age, Lily discovered my lycanthropy-- or rather guessed it, because she was always good in putting two and two together, and watched me to doublecheck before she confronted me with it. Despite my infinite pleas not to tell the rest of the Marauders, she did, starting with James who, she'd told me then, she was positive would not cast me away. Your mother was always an excellent judge of character as well as a quick study." Remus grinned at the memory. Harry smiled, feeling the positivism permeating both him and Remus.

"People rarely talk about mom." he offered as a sign of his thanks. Remus continued

"Lily found the way that I would be helped and would not be alone when the wolf took over. She managed to get us a book on animagi."

Harry was amazed.

"It was mom's idea? Was she an animagus too?"

"Not to my knowledge, but Lily wanted to be an Unspeakable-- and so perhaps she did not want to reveal her status as one, if she'd been so. She was always there when James and Sirius and Peter practiced, but she never practiced with them. Anyway, there was this one evening I remember pretty well, when I woke up because James was down in the common room and beating up the couch in frustration. See, he just would not transfigure past his tail and antlers no matter how hard he tried. The transformation would just not complete. It was at that stage Sirius came up with the name 'Prongs' for him."

Harry chuckled, highly interested. It was the first time he was hearing a story about his father NOT being a hotshot in something, and he oddly enough found he liked this more humanized version of his father much more than the one on the pedestal.

"So what happened?"

"Lily came down and offered him a cup of hot cocoa-- your dad had always been a sucker for it. And when he calmed down, and had told her how much he was trying and could not get it right, she merely told him 'perhaps you are trying too hard'."

Harry sighed, his shoulder slightly slumping.

"And in the next 20 minutes he became the stag?"

Remus laughed, and patted Harry's hand.

"Oh goodness no. It took him about 2 more days to completely unwind, relax and let his senses guide him to his animagus form. But he did it." Remus opened the door to Harry's room and ruffled Harry's hair affectionately.

"As will you."

Thassit! In the next chapter: Ron, Hermione, Wands and Birthdays! And, if he is a good boy and eats his porridge, perhaps a little more Voldie too.

For those still wondering about the Dursleys, they are.... *low voice, music* very close....

Snape rhe yet again and thinks of trying some Amaretto before he gets stoned with brandy heh.

As for my wonderful reviewers:

Lady Lunar Phoenix: *L* on the contrary, I see him grabbing Colin's camera... hehe.

white owl: hm.. exactly how does that work?

Angel Baby: Awww thanks! And I don't need to tell you that unwittingly, Severus is creating a prototype of stealth and speed. heh.

Kimmy: thanks!

phoenbixfeather: Yes, I do think that dumbledore as JK depicts him is not entirely a ruthless stretegist-- whereas I can easily see Snape as being one. You can see his changes!! weeeee! I was thinking they were far too subtle, which they are, but you know... it's good to have readers pick them out.

shitsumon: somehow, even in the books I think McGonagall is not entirely into the spotlight. But in this one, she will add her own two cents, or knuts, rest assured. As for Filch, he is at the moment keeping away from where Harry is by DUmbleodore's request-- later on... we'll see.

Kateri: nope, definately not good, but Harry is inherently good, and he has Dumbledore to help him with his frame of reference.

Mikee: Let's hope that I have been of satisfactory performance :)

Lady Phoenix Gryffindor: You know what they say-- you can't find it, you can make it. *grin*

Jaimynsfire: thank you, mylady :)

Kaat Shadow Lover: Impossible as it may sound, I do not have easy access to comics-- they are too far away and I am far too busy to commute. Also I do not want to read something about a blind person while I am writing something about a blind person which I have rather plotted out in stages... and I am afraid of marvel comics-- they tend to grasp your mind with their plot bunnies and never let you go. I don't want Harry to be DD. It would be too... presumptuous. Snape won't allow it. hehe. But if I come across it, I will read it. My theory as to what Voldie is trying to prove can be found in Snape's ruminations in 'In the End'. heh.

venus 4280: WOW WHAT A GREAT REVIEW! I love the big ones! It was funny, about Remus, I agree. I bet he's been peeking at times during sessions. hehe. And I like your idea (had one such in my head as an incentive for something that will need to be done later). So look for it in upcoming chapters :) I am glad you like my story!

Zardiphillian Beryllix: well, welcome aboard! As for originality, I think that it has been done before. It is just loaded with slash, and well... *shrugs* I am doing the slash-free version. hehe.

candleot: well, isn't that what he's supposed to be? *ducks Snape from a blow with a candlestick

Koneko Toshi: Ooooo bribe cookies! How can I resist?

walks in with a warm mug of coffee, takes up usual seat in front of the fireplace, Snape charms it to have a lovely warm blaze Weather's more manageable, but the cold is simply wicked. hee hee.

Snape breathes in the aroma from his mystery coffee *pouts* he won't tell me what he put inside! *waaahs*

Anyhow, let's start and see what happens today, eh?

Ch8, *hits play*

"Stop scowling, Potter, and instead put that energy into your rather unsatisfactory hearing efforts," Snape growled, his mind in the same time racing as to how he could facilitate this task for the boy somewhat more. Much as he hated making anything easy for Harry Potter, he was well aware that what he was asking of the teenager was far from easy. He had been rather surprised to see Harry able to dodge the two rubber balls so soon.

But time was flying. He needed the boy to have his wand back within the week, if not today. But now he had told Potter that this would not happen unless all three balls were dodged-- which would be in Snape's opinion sufficient proof of the boy's awareness and ability not to freeze solid should he find himself with nothing but his 4 senses to help him in a situation. Harry groaned, then took two or three deep breaths, muttering to himself 'let my senses guide me... relax... god, relax already...'.

Snape nodded to himself and clicked his tongue, his usual signal to get Harry's attention during sessions.

"Right, Potter, if you are done with the self-admonishing, listen to this for a while. I am not going to throw the balls at you for a few seconds. Just stand where you are and listen to all three of them. Or is that too much to ask?" he drawled, to ensure the boy's stubbornness would also kick in and help the concentration. The determined clench of teeth satisfied the Potions Master enough.

"Alright. Listen up." he said and started to throw the balls across and back, letting them ring in the silence, allowing the sound to soak into

the boy's awareness as well as get some of the tension that the werewolf had spoken to him about out. Of course he'd never admit to Lupin that he had taken his pointer seriously...

Harry listened to the sound the three balls were making, to the three almost identical, yet somewhat subtly different rings they were making, and pictured their trajectories from Snape's hands and back in his mind, all the time breathing evenly, and relaxing as much as he could muster it. 4 days after Remus' walk with him, he had made little progress, managing to dodge the third ball only once or twice.

When one ball moved towards him as he was thinking and listening, Harry stepped to the side, instinctively ducking to let the second one's sound pass him by, then turning to the left for the third one, then jump again forward to avoid the returning one...

... it took Potter about 5 minutes to realise that he had finally done it. It was one of the rare times that Snape felt like hopping to the sound of the victory dance and saying 'Yes!'. That much was his satisfaction at seeing Potter's fluidity and instincts now that the boy was not given the heads up when he suddenly started to throw the balls at him again.

The bloody werewolf had been correct!

Harry's whoops of delight brought the Potions Master to proper levels of guarded approval again, and he banished the balls, patiently waiting out for about a minute of Potter's antics at his realisation that he had conquered one of the hardest milestones he'd ever have to conquer in his training.

"Are you done cheering, Potter?"

The boy turned to face the tall dark man, and grinning he approached, following the sound of the Potions Master's voice, hand out as if waiting to receive. Snape arched an eyebrow. He knew that this was about the wand, but he felt still reluctant to relinquish it to the boy. Not because he particularly liked withholding it from him, but because he still felt slightly not reassured about whether Harry was ready to

handle magic to the full extend that he had had before. Snape was a man that always doublechecked.

He snorted to Harry's face, and said lazily at the boy's quickly fading smile:

"Are you groping for something in particular, perhaps?"

Harry frowned and said in a very controlled and guarded voice:

"My wand, Snape. I want it. I dodged the balls; I did whatever you wanted all this time. Now I want my wand back."

"Whatever happened to 'Professor' Snape? Do you think you will attain your goal with rudeness?" Snape drawled and crossed his arms as Harry approached even more, the realisation that perhaps Snape would not give him back his wand after all creeping in and clutching at his heart like a cold, wraithish hand.

He took in a deep breath, his eyes darkening with the withheld anger, and said in the voice he had always used in class when he was burning to tell Snape off and didn't in fear of him deducting points:

"Please, Professor Snape, I would like my wand back."

Snape grinned in murthless amusement. The experiment had taken form in his mind and was already taking place.

"No." he purred, playfully almost. Harry's fist clenched.

"You promised."

"I never recall pledging anything to you." Snape watched the boy with interest, wondering how the young Gryffindor would possibly convince him to relinquish something he was not sure he was ready for yet.

"You must give it to me." Harry's unmoving eyes stared through the potions master's chest, sparkling with the formation of a plan as well

as seething anger. Snape stood his ground and tapped his fingers on his other arm as they were crossed.

"There is nothing I 'must' do for you, Potter."

"Oh, but there is, Professor Snape. You really must give me back my wand..." Harry smiled snakishly, his green eyes like a cobra's, losing in their mesmerising capabilities only because they could not focus on the target.

Snape smirked to himself.

"Kindly explain to m--"

He noticed how close Harry had suddenly, soundlessly come up to him too late. The boy's hands snaked at the hand that was tapping on his other arm, and lightning fast had found the wand holster up Snape's sleeve--

-- and the Potion Master's wand was in Harry's hands.

Harry grinned to himself, tilting his head as he jumped backwards, pointing the wand at Snape and putting him in a body bind before he had a chance to move away. The whole thing had taken place in less than 5 seconds.

Snape was enormously angry but in the same time enormously pleased, and barely caught Harry's words through his thoughts of how accomplished Harry had become, and how this warmed his usually cold heart-- or perhaps it was the white hot anger at being thus treated by a student that was contributing to the tingly feeling.

"... do you see my point now, professor Snape?" Harry was saying in much the same drawl as Snape himself.

Snape gritted his teeth and growled for Harry's satisfaction more than his own externalisation of feelings.

"You are enormously lucky even for a Gryffindor that it is summer, Potter, or your house would not make it to last place in the next

decade from the points I would take off. How monstrously despicable to attack a professor! Your cheek has gone too far!" he shouted at Harry, safely feeling that his voice did not imply his face's real expression. Harry was almost scowling by the end of his words, whereupon Snape stopped shouting as suddenly as he had begun and said in his matter-of-fact voice:

"And you will find your wand waiting for you on your bed in your room, of course. How idiotic to believe that I would be keeping it on me. Now release me or I -will- assign detention on you regardless the summer break."

Harry found that he loved his wand more than he did his broom, and he still worshipped his broom. But his wand gave him what he had been afraid he would never re-gain.

Freedom.

It was much more than just holding it so it would lead him to places, allowing him not to count the steps, to pay attention to details, to sounds, to enjoy the subtle changes in the wind without being afraid he was about to go splat into a wall. He felt protected-- his success with Snape had given him back more of his confidence than dodging the three balls did. He was so glad that he had achieved this unexpected level of skill that he wasn't sure he hated the grumpy, greasy git anymore-- of course he could expect nothing than chides and rudeness from him, but -- he had trained him, after all. He had prodded him to go on and on and on beyond what he thought were his limits, and indeed the one moment Harry recalled he was really about to shatter to pieces that would forever be lost, hadn't the man picked him up and tried to support him, even in his crude, unpracticed manners?

Harry smiled to himself. It was with that smile that Minerva McGonagall saw Harry enter in Dumbledore's office, sure-footed and (merlin!) confident as he had always been. The Head of Gryffindor house allowed her glance to trail down to Harry's right hand, the wand hand, that was bandaged still, implying the scarred, fragile

tissue beneath. She marvelled at the strength the boy displayed. And in the same time she felt ashamed that her eyes were red-rimmed and that her heart had up to now burned with sorrow and despair.

"Hello, Harry." she said in her uptight manner and Harry turned his slightly upturned face towards her. His eyes looked off a little to the right, but they were bright and charming as ever. The boy was leaner, she noticed, much more exercised than she expected his thin frame to be able to become, and he had grown somewhat taller-- or perhaps he just didn't hunch anymore. His face had the stamp of strain and pain and all the emotions that, like hammer and anvil on metal, shape the soul into a masterpiece.

She marvelled.

Harry smiled and nodded to her once, lowering his wand.

"Professor McGonagall. I'm glad to meet you."

Dumbledore was bursting with pride and did not dare think what this year would yield. He said happily, eyes twinkling:

"Harry, Professor McGonagall has returned somewhat earlier to Hogwarts-- she will help you with the parameters of studying and writing and being able to cope in classes. Although professor Flitwick is the Charms professor, I do think that you and Minerva will have more fun."

Dumbledore nodded to McGonagall who cleared her throat and picked up a couple of letters.

"We will start promptly, Harry, with ways to read from letters and books; and none too soon, for you have mail, from Miss Granger and Mr Weasley, as I see here."

Harry blanched and his colour left him. He had forgotten about his friends and the fact that they were oblivious to his new status and predicament. What was he supposed to do, what was he supposed to say? Would Ron treat him like an invalid, would Hermione burst into

tears? Would they regard him as someone dangerous or weak, would they forget Harry and treat him as someone completely different?

Dumbledore went over to Harry and touched his shoulder again. Again the soothing effect helped Harry straighten up.

"As of yet, Mr Weasley and Miss Granger do not know anything else than the fact you are now staying in Hogwarts instead of Surrey. I felt it was up to your discretion to let them know and in which way to let them know."

Harry bit his lip and shifted his weight. Passing his hand through his hair, he said softly:

"I... am not sure what I should tell them... and what... will happen."

Dumbledore nodded to himself and thought for a while. Then he smiled.

"I do believe that your birthday is coming up in a week or so. It is only fitting to have a small party. Of course professor McGonagall is going to help you keep up your correspondence until you are free to do it on your own. It will be up to you to let your friends know on your birthday, or before that."

"What do I do, Remus? I mean, I... would hate to hear pity in their voice. I don't want them to mourn as if I am dead, and I know that they will." Harry was pacing in his room, unheeded, as if sighted-- he knew his quarters so well by now there was no need to focus on where his subconscious would direct his body.

"You can't avoid their initial reactions, Harry. They will be sad, and they will be angry as you had been, but then they will see that it is not any kind of end, just like you did." Remus said, shivering inwardly thinking about Sirius. He wondered if Harry had yet thought about his fugitive godfather and his countenance towards anyone that even thought of harming Harry.

"I guess...," Harry swallowed and took a deep breath as he went to the writing desk and sat there. He pulled out a piece of parchment and felt around until he was certain it was smooth and open on the page. He took out his wand and elegantly flicked it over.

"Scribulus," he ordered and started to dictate as ink seeped into words on the surface:

"Dear Ron,

I did not answer immediately because I had to think about what I have to tell you, and how to tell you. I have good news and bad news. I'll start off with the bad. I beg you to finish the letter and also get to the good ones, alright?

You will probably see that this letter is not in my handwriting. That is because I am dictating it with a charm McGonagall taught me. There is no gentle way I can think of putting this, so I'll just say it right out: I am blind, Ron. I don't want to tell you how, so don't bother asking, but I am blind. These are the bad news.

Now for the good news: I get never to go back to the Dursleys. I am already getting a lot of help from everyone -- even Snape! You wouldn't believe this, but rude git that he is, he is the one that trained me to be able to move freely around and be aware of stuff and all. Dumbledore never lets me lose hope, either, and McGonagall is teaching me how to cope in class, which is kid's stuff compared to Snape's sessions, believe me.

More good news: Our DADA professor will be professor Lupin! He has been here with me from the start and he will stay to teach this year, too. I hear him swallow and sniffle as I am dictating this to you. I bet he's all mushy right now." Harry smiled softly, warmly as he paused a little to hear Remus better, who indeed was doing his best not to let his emotions get the best of him, while hearing Harry compose his letter. He didn't know if he felt pride, or sorrow, or anger or all three in the same time. Harry continued.

"Even more good news: I get to have a real birthday party here in Hogwarts for my birthday, and you are all invited. Dumbledore

wouldn't have it otherwise, and I miss you too. Please come, and please don't be sad about me. I am not.

see you soon,

Harry"

Harry terminated the charm of the ink writing, duplicated and folded the two identical letters. He addressed one to Ron and another to Hermione. He swallowed and sighed, thinking.

"I miss Hedwig, Remus. Do you think they might have sent the letters off with her?" he asked, still not entirely happy that he had not been the one receiving the letters first hand.

"She is in the owlery, waiting to be called." Remus smiled softly as he saw the way Harry's expression lit up and he got up, pointed his wand to the door and said: "Directa Owlery."

Remus smiled softly, to himself, sitting in the now empty room of Harry's. He shut his eyes and leaned back, and found that truly, in this room, there was peace along with the pain he was helping his friend's son fight against.

He only hoped that in the end, there would only be peace left.

One more chapter to go before September 1, Sirius Black and Rita Skeeter! Woohoooo!

Snape bristles and prepares deadly means

shrieks TWO HUNDRED REVIEWS! I love you! I love you all! You are so wonderful and so encouraging! The delicious long reviews help my finetuning, the short ones egg me on and don't let me go until I have updated! You are the best! Even Snape is tempted to smile, imagine that! *laughs*

white owl: That is rather good! However, summoning is wandless magic, so I think it is safe for Harry to depend on that. Also, I think the

whole thing with the balls has probably taught him about distance somewhat. We'll see. If this becomes too fast too soon, tell me.

Angel Baby: hee hee. I hope we all get a taste of 'stealth Harry' in this one. I hope you enjoyed.

candleot: I am hoping to show that. I mean, Voldie smiles a LOT more than Severus. heh.

spacecatdet: VERY good question! And good point! I won't answer, though. heh.

venus4280: I think that the visions are cruel, especially for someone as inherently good as Harry. It doesn't help much unless he sees it as what Snape said it is: leverage against Voldie. I hope you like the characters as they evolve-- they are almost down to what they will more or less be for a while. They can't be identical to canon of course because there is a new variable involved-- Harry's blindness. But it will be very close to that, I am hoping. Hope you liked the chapter.

Kaat Shadow Lover: *shudders at the delicious review in delight* I have seen fanart of sandman's death, but that's all I've seen and know of her. As for Severus, he doesn't want to tell Voldie Harry can see him, no. But he wants to have some information that he can't have known to leak, so that suspicious as to who is the spy will be drawn away from his person. More or less. :) Of course, Harry will have to -want- to do that, and at the moment he doesn't even want to discuss it. He acts as if it never happened. He is not sure if he LIKES watching the visions or if he hates it. In short, he's messed up about that. But he'll cope, of course. *grins* trust me. As for more chapters, I will if you are so enthusiastic-- I won't be able to help it! *chuckles*

Melissa Lupin: I have to act as Harry would, and considering, I think he'd tell them now, give them time to roll it around in their heads until his bday, then dread September 1 when all the wizarding world will know. *grins* As for Malfoy, *Snape clamps her mouth* *writes a note: I am not allowed to say yet*

Darkhorse8100: Wait till chapter 9. It will be there, promise. Inquiring Minds can advertise it. hehe.

Tinuviel: I am glad you liked my Marauders little flashback there! *grins* I was fearing that nobody really paid attention to that part. *grins like mad at the review number* I never thought I would be so fueled-- I mean it. I update faster than I thought I could. Ah, the joys of conditioning. hehe.

Koneko Tenshi:*gets cookies, hands you a Snape 'hundred flavour milkshake' it's tested, it's safe, and it's delllllicious. *heh* I am sorry for misspelling your name. I hope I did it right this time.

comes in after dinner, Snape hands her her coffee mug and sits elegantly in the other armchair He still hasn't told me what he puts in this dream coffee of his. *le glare*

Thank you all for your wonderful reviewing. It really does help me and I anticipate it every time I update (which is obvious by now, I should think). As always, I answer to reviews at the end.

Ooookay. Chapter 9. *hits play*

"Goodmorning Harry. You look rather flushed." Madam Pomfrey greeted the boy that silently entered the infirmary as the orientation spell guided his wand hand like a seeing-eye dog would a muggle. Harry was indeed sweating, some of his unruly black hair damp against his forehead, and he had a quickly fading scowl.

"I am only just finished with Professor Snape's idea of gymnastics," he said almost flippantly, but lately there was a steely edge beneath the amicability in his voice. Madam Pomfrey huffed, never having really approved the way the Potions Master handled the Boy-Who-Lived, and approached.

"Well if you ever feel even the tiniest discomfort, come tell me and I will see to it that he checks his speed." she said like a worried mother. Harry grinned only because of the endearing affectionate, mothering hue the nurse's voice had.

"Don't worry, Madam, I will." he said, chuckling to himself at the image of both the potions master and the matron livid and snapping insults back and forth over his training.

Poppy waited as Harry pocketed his wand and extended his bandaged arm. She gently started unwrapping the bandages, a procedure that up to then always took place in complete silence and a bit of shaky breathing. Today was the added element of contemplation. She glimpsed Harry's frown as he felt her ministrations, saw how his skin pricked, sensitive and alert to any kind of touch. She bit her lip as she always did when the last layer of bandages was removed.

Harry's hand and forearm were terribly scarred with what seemed to be wavy lines erratically marring the boy's skin. They were still reddish and angry, but healing fast under the charms she put on them. She only wished she could eliminate the scarring. Not that it could not be concealed with glamourie, but it felt different when scars were really gone.

"Can I touch?"

Harry's low voice startled her. He had never before used such a deep, low voice around her. It was the voice of a different Harry-- more hurt, less frivolous, stronger, more mature...-- or perhaps she was just jumpy.

"Eh, what was that, dear?"

"My arm. Can I feel the scarring?" Harry repeated, his voice never going higher than the octave that made Poppy shiver without knowing why.

"Yes, of course." she said and she withdrew her hands as Harry's fingers lightly, gently tapped and touched around at the area. She watched his expression closely. His eyes were staring off in middle distance, unmoving, but they were the deepest sea of turbulent emotions she had seen in such a young face. It was as if scenes were playing in Harry's mind...

... "What is all this smoke!? You waste of space, what did you ruin now?" ...

... "You like burning stuff eh? I'll show you burning!" -- "Uncle No!"

... "You DARE to raise your hands to thwart me..!?" ...

.... "DON'T YOU DARE GLARE AT ME!" --

Harry snapped out of it with a small gasp, and blinked many times to ease the prickling feeling in his eyes. As for the storm around his heart, he'd see how he could deal with that later.

"Harry, dear?" Poppy's concerned voice made Harry take one deep breath and wash away whatever expression he had been wearing while he exhaled. He withdrew his hand from his forearm, and smiled weakly. Or at least he thought he smiled.

"I'm done, Madam Pomfrey. Will you wrap it up again?"

"Just for this week, until there is no danger of infection, Harry." she said gently and started to wrap the cool ribbon of cloth around his hand and moving upwards.

Harry stayed silent for some of the process, but then he felt his heart would burst if he did not ask what had been plaguing him since he had started to think of something else besides the fact that he was doomed because he was now blind.

"Who brought me back to Hogwarts?"

Poppy barely looked up from her work.

"Why, Professor Snape did. And quite livid he was about it."

If Harry was surprised, he did not initially show it.

"About having to fetch me?"

"Oh no. About having to leave those muggles alive, I think were his words." Poppy said and charmed the bandage to stay fresh and in place until next day.

Snape paced around his quarters in the dungeons, immersed in thoughts. Mostly about Harry Potter. He was racking his brains to find out a way for the boy to be able to cope in Potions. Charms could help him in reading and writing, but vision was important for Potions: colour, hue, bubbling surface, all these could be only assessed with sight.

Snape eyed the armchair opposite him, then took up a piece of cloth and tied his eyes, standing there for a while, savouring a mild approximation of what Harry was going through.

He found he hated it. He managed to stump a toe and hit a knee before reaching the armchair and sitting in it. Leaning his head back, still wearing the blindfold, he couldn't help recalling that day, that he had only sketchily described to Dumbledore...

... "You shall have what is yours, -muggle-. Dolero Projectum!" he growled and instantly Vernon started screaming as all the pain that he had inflicted on his young charge that day suddenly crashed onto him. Snape's voice hissed across like the blade of an axe falling. Curses were flung to the skinny wife and monstrous son, and the door shut behind them with a bang, enclosing them in. He put the son on bodybind -- a painful one. He hung the woman suspended upside down from the ceiling.

For Vernon, he had other plans...

He waved his wand around lazily as Vernon's body followed the tip's route regardless the occasional obstacle, be it wall, window, door or furniture. The man went bloody in no time. He shrieked and begged for mercy, and Snape relished in his whines, almost forgetting that he was holding an unconscious, seriously injured boy in one arm. He remembered it only when Harry tried to cough and instead oozed some more blood on the potion master's sleeve. Snape let the Vernon crash in front of his feet and scowled at him. He crucioed him for a little, and when the screams died down after he let up the curse, he spoke.

"I do not have the time to finish giving to you what is your own, Dursley-- but I will return. See to it that I forget to." he said silkily to the trembling lump of lard in front of him and left, leaving all the charms and curses he casted in full effect....

Snape removed the blindfold with a terrible scowl. He should have done more. Of all the atrocities Severus Snape had seen, he still seethed at the barest notion of child abuse. He stormed out of the

dungeons and towards Hogsmeade. Although he had not thought about his problems, he had found a solution to them.

It was Harry's birthday.

Ron stepped into Hogwarts grounds rather stiffly. He had had about 4 whole days to stomach Harry's letter and he still could not live with it. Hermione had arranged to meet him so they would meet Harry together at the same time. Ron fidgeted around, feeling like he had no stomach. He had left his mother still weeping, Ginny still not coming out of the room and Fred and George being unusually quiet in their room. His father had clenched his teeth and had read and re-read Harry's letter as if it would yield more information.

Ron didn't need more information. Only two sources of trouble could have inflicted this much damage to Harry: Voldemort and those muggles he had to live with. Either case was terrible.

"Hey, Ron." Hermione ran up to him. He saw her eyes were tired and her face blotchy, as if she had been crying and tried to mask the effects. Looking at each other for a long moment, they hugged each other.

"Have you seen him yet?" she asked timidly. Ron shook his head.

"No. We'd agreed that we would go meet him together."

"How do you suppose he'll be?"

"I dunno. Probably mental if Snape is plaguing him on top of everything else. Why did Dumbledore let the git near him?"

"Now, Ron. I am sure that the Headmaster knows what he's doing. And watch your tongue, because you should not tell Harry anything stupid." she started by admonishing and ended up by snapping at her red-haired companion. They started towards the entrance of the castle as Ron nodded thoughtfully.

Harry was sitting in the main hall, and was feeling decidedly queazy. There had been no reply from either Ron or Hermione, so he had no way of knowing if they would come to his birthday party or not. He hoped and in the same time dreaded that they would. Remus smiled as he sat down next to him in the couch.

"No worries, Harry. Everything will go smoothly. You'll see."

"I don't know. I am.. hell. I would prefer to go try and dodge four balls and Snape himself than have this blow up in my face..." Harry muttered, wringing his now-agile fingers together.

Remus chuckled.

"Careful, Harry, or dear Severus will take you up on that."

Harry was about to reply when he heard the door open, and the shuffling feet of newcomers. He stiffened and swallowed. They would enter the hall any minute now... any minute now...

"Harry!" Hermione's voice rang out, and quick steps implied she trotted to meet him as he got up. He spread his hands, and Hermione walked into his hug and held him there. Harry shut his eyes and smiled.

"Hey, 'Mione. Missed you so much. I thought I heard Ron enter with you?"

"I'm here, Harry. What do you mean you heard me?" Ron's voice was a bit numb, but it did not tick off alarms in Harry. He smiled instead, amused.

"I mean I heard you enter. And you were muttering."

Hermione was all bossy immediately.

"You have been learning how to be alert to your environment, eh Harry? Well I read some things too, and I have also checked up on some information about how muggles cope with-- with what you cope,

and there is also Braille that you can learn-- if you ever want to that is--"

"Mione.." Harry said with a smile that was both sad and happy. She paused. "You're babbling." Harry smirked, and Ron chortled beside himself. He turned to Harry.

"Let us all sit down again, then, and we have to have some music, too." Remus said, and Hermione and Ron beamed to see the most popular DADA professor ever be there. They had been so pre-occupied with Harry, they had not noticed anyone else. Remus grinned and after the usual greetings and Harry's attestation to him being infinitely supportive to him, he waved his wand and bouncy, cheerful music was heard throughout the hall. He then surreptitiously left to leave the trio alone.

It was almost time for presents and sweets when Ron burst.

"Harry are you really blind or are you putting us on?"

Harry blinked.

"Uh, Ron, are you okay or have you drank something you shouldn't?"

"You act too confident. You are not clumsy and you seem to have no trouble moving around. Ouch!" he yelped as Hermione kicked him under the table. Remus smiled proudly, Harry didn't know whether to laugh or be irritated. Hermione tried to patch things up.

"Forgive him Harry, really he--"

"No, it's alright Hermione. He's right. But I have had a lot of time to practice, Ron. Basically my work with Snape."

Ron breathed his pumpkin juice from the surprise.

"You mean to tell me Snape helped you not be an invalid?"

"RON!"

Harry knew he should have been angry. He should have felt insulted. But instead he felt like grabbing Ron from the temples and kissing him on either cheek for what he had so un-politically correct stated. So he threw his head back and laughed.

"Yes Ron, Snape helped me not be an invalid. I am not learning how to cope in classes, and tomorrow I start duelling, because Snape is jittery..." Harry paused, tilting his head to the side and then smirked, "and I believe he's coming along with two more teachers, if I am not mistaken."

"Man, you are spooky." Ron muttered as he saw at the other end of the main hall Dumbledore, McGonagall, Lupin and Snape approach. Dumbledore was wearing a little conical paper hat, and when they reached where the three students were sitting, he said cheerfully:

"It is time for presents, I believe. I couldn't miss this. I have brought the proper accessories for party-times, I believe." he said as he handed a little paper hat to each of the professors, then Ron and Hermione, and lastly he placed one on Harry's birdnest hair. He chuckled and fastened it under his chin. Remus had already done so, whereas McGonagall and Snape had a little trouble reconciling with the idea and only did so after Dumbledore looked at them meaningfully. Still, Snape's managed to look miserable to be perched on the potions master's head. Ron severely wished he had a camera, and Hermione was slack-jawed.

"Close your mouth, Miss Granger, you are not a codfish." Snape snapped at her, and she closed her mouth so fast her teeth clacked.

Dumbledore made himself comfortable and said:

"Let's have the presents appear, then! It is no small matter turning 15.", and he clapped his hands.

Harry heard the rustling and the small pops and he knew that he must be facing a number of boxes in front of him. Dumbledore's voice chirped at his ears as a box was pressed into his hands.

"This is from me!" he beamed, overly proud of himself. Harry smiled warmly. It was the first time that he was sitting at a table having presents presented to him like Dudley-- no, he did not want to remember Dudley now. He unwrapped the paper, hearing it rip and opened the box, his fingers tracing the cotton inside until he found a round glass sphere, or so it seemed. He arched an eyebrow, unsure of what he had just received from the headmaster of the school.

"It is a notiem sphere-- when you feel overwhelmed with emotions, you hold it in your hands, and it will help." Dumbledore said softly, and Harry's heart skipped beats, instantly the ball of crystal becoming precious to him. He carefully set it aside as Remus tossed lazily his box towards Harry-- and Harry caught it almost in reflex. Snape's shoulders seemed to relax, and Ron gaped.

"Man you're eerie."

"RON!"

Harry chuckled and unwrapped the next one. Fingers tracing again, he found a dictaquill set and ink. He smiled thinly.

"Is it like Rita Skeeter's?" he asked and everyone chuckled.

McGonagall's gift was a Read-Me feather. It would read to its owner out of any book it was placed in. Next came Ron's box, rather large, with a lot of sweets and other homely delights from Mrs. Weasley and a talking quidditch book from Ron, who had found it after 3 days of searching with his father. Harry was touched. He had not expected this much acceptance. Hermione's gift was a fold-in cane, charmed to be heard only to Harry.

"I wanted to give you something as useful as possible-- for when magic is not handy," she said and Harry smirked.

"Thanks, 'Mione. I am glad to have it. I have been... shown the need of independence from magic quite a bit."

Snape snorted and stepped forward.

"Right, let's get this over with, Potter. Here is my gift-- make sure you use it well." he said quickly and then left before Harry opened the box, which he was feeling had little holes in it.

"Harry, make sure you are careful opening this." Ron couldn't help saying and dodged one of the by now predictable kicks coming from Hermione. Harry smirked again.

"Ron, I am sure we are all quite safe with Professor Dumbledore and Lupin and McGonagall here." Harry laughed, and so did Dumbledore who cherished the sound of Harry's laughter-- he had not been heard until that day.

"Well then, Harry, let's see what he got you." Remus said and Minerva tilted forward, curious herself.

Harry indeed opened the box (it had no wrapping), and allowed his fingers to edge inside. At first he felt nothing existing in the box except sand, but then a cool, thin band of something slithered up his fingers and around his wrist. There were sudden intakes of breaths all around him, and Harry asked quietly:

"What kind of snake?"

"It's a coral snake, Harry," Hermione said, somewhat excitedly, somewhat scared.

"What do you know, it's red, black, white and yellow. It's a Gryffindor snake," Remus' voice was bouncy with laughter.

"It can be your familiar, Harry." Dumbledore said, "a most useful one indeed."

"Are you masssster Harry?" the snake hissed at Harry.

"Yes, as a matter of fact." he replied in Parseltongue.

"You do not see." the snake said. Harry sighed.

"No, I don't."

"No matter. I am Sasssha. I shhall help you when you need." the snake slithered fondly twice around his wrist and allowed the tip of its forked tongue to caress Harry's skin. Harry smiled.

"Her name is Sasha, and she likes me." he announced to his incredulous friends and grinning professors.

and that's that. Upcoming: Voldemort, Wormtail, Malfoys galore. hehe.

As for the lovely reviewers:

momma-dar: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

kitty: all shall be answered in good time. Heh heh. As for Sirius, I have never seen him take anything calmly.

Lei Dumbledore: Let's then pretend it was a lock-legs charm or something. Or not a full body bind.

Kiri: Yes, but then Snape would crucio me to within an inch of his life. hehe.

NightSpear: I am glad you like my Snape. I believe that people never change overnight. And never without good cause.

white owl: you bet he will. *nod nod*

Angel Baby: Weasley twins... hm. *L* yes, I suppose, eventually. They are rather challenging to write without making them complete prats or idiots. But shall try. You guessed my sevvie gift! aww. But it was not anonymous. Anyhow it would have been obvious, it being a snake. heh.

Jordan: Charms, mostly.

Jess the Great: eh... I don't think so. At least, not for a long time. It wouldn't be permanent otherwise.

Lee Lee Potter: he just might! *chuckles*

shitsumon: what are they up to? eh... if I were them, I wouldn't be up to anything. *L* Not anymore.

ratgirl: we get to know his initial reactions once he is in Hogwarts-- as this is mainly through Snape's or Harry's POVs.

Kaat Shadow Lover: the wand leads him to places-- he still has to have awareness. But it DOES make his life tons easier. I hope you liked my Ron and Hermione-- I admit they are not my strongest. As for Diagon alley, sure. heh. It's coming up. But one step at a time, don't overwhelm the author. heh. And Harry can't get over something like that so easily-- if ever.

zeynel: he can be an animagus. But I doubt it's high in his priority list now. I hope this chapter has started to answer your questions.

Zardiphillian Beryllix: Heh heh. Well I think there had to be one point where James wasn't entirely quick on the uptake. Like Harry and the accio charm. I'll try to use mum instead of mom but it is kinda hard at times. But I'll try. How do you like Ron in this chapter?

Melissa Lupin: *chuckles* I am not going on the OOC trail.

enlil: uh... sorry bout not answering to your review-- it probably had no questions, or the bot ate it and I did not see it. About this one: Of course you find out what happened-- I'd said so. *laughs* As for Rita, you will have to wait for a chapter or two yet. I'll try about Full Circle-- I have other stuff to write too you know, not just fanfiction.

walks in smugly with an incredulous Snape holding a cappuccino heh. I did not expect Snape not knowing how to whip cream. *Snape seeths* hee hee.

Thank you all for your wonderful encouragement! As of now I am changing the rating to PG-13. I have never been good with ratings--in Greece nobody pays attention to them really. I hope that all of you are okay with the rating now. *holds up a peace sign* Many thanks to those knights in shining armour wanting to shield me from flames--much appreciated!!!

Right... let's see now, the next stage of Harry's training... heh. Time is almost up!

Chapter 10. *hits play*

"You finally deign to show, Potter." Snape sneered, though it was not venomous. Harry nodded, a bit perplexed.

"I am on time, Professor. Why have we switched classrooms?"

"Use whatever mind you have left Potter-- we are starting duelling today. The duelling club room is far better a place to do it, don't you think?" Snape said as he peeled off his cloak. Harry nodded to himself.

"Then just a second while I leave Sasha at some chair, out of the way."

Snape arched an eyebrow.

"You brought the snake with you?" he asked, then kicked himself mentally.

Harry paused.

"Yes. She's a very pleasant company." he said, but the question was underlying his voice. He let his cloak pool on a couch against the room's wall, and hissed to the colourful snake to stay on it while he was having his lesson. Snape gritted his teeth. For a Gryffindor,

Potter had started to pick out far too many things from far too little evidence. Good skill, but Snape already hated it.

"Step up on the platform, it's a few steps to your left." Snape said, fingering his wand. He watched as Harry complied, his feet carefully stepping forward. He stepped onto the platform and faced the potions master.

"In new places, Hermione's cane helps." Harry said thoughtfully. Snape sighed.

"You may use it when we are not having sessions."

"Why not during?"

"Because I can't risk you freezing like an owl in daylight should you lose it!" Snape snapped and Harry backstepped without thinking. Snape's voice dropped to a more neutral tone as he ordered:

"Get your wand out and stand at the ready. You have leverage in a duel, because now you depend on your hearing. Can you imagine why or should I spell it out for you?"

Harry clenched his teeth momentarily to control his indignation, then answered in that guarded voice he always used with the Potions Master:

"Because you have to speak the charms or curses."

"Indeed. You will have some fractions of a second extra to react that a sighted adversary-- and these fractions can save your life, miserable thought it is."

Harry rolled his eyes. Much as he was not that affected by the potions master's chiding lately, it was getting rather tiring. He wondered if he thought that what was egging Harry on was some kind of stubbornness to disprove Snape's wrong accusations. It might have been up to a point, but Harry wanted more than anything to get back a semblance of compatibility with his peers-- he would do anything the potions master asked anyway.

"But how shall I dodge, Professor? A curse does not ring like a ball." he asked.

Snape liked that Harry was not overconfident.

"You always move from where you are standing-- as dramatically as possible. And you always put up a shielding charm. Better yet, you attack before your adversary has the chance to complete the casting he is doing."

"But how do I get a good aim?"

Snape clicked his tongue irritably.

"You aimed pretty well when I was the target. You use your hearing. We will fine tune it with these practices. Now-- less talk, more work."

Snape had barely uttered his last words when Harry heard a suspicious mutter, only to be flung into the air and dropped on the floor again by the well-placed curse. He grunted.

"Never allow chit-chat to distract--" Snape had started saying when Harry, livid for the lack of warning, aimed his wand at the sound and shouted Expelliarmous rather loudly.

Snape ducked easily, as Harry's aim was off.

"You didn't even get the correct wall." he sneered at the boy that was picking himself up.

Harry's scalp prickled as he heard another subtle muttering that sounded suspiciously like 'locked legs', and he jumped to the side like a panicked frog.

"Good. That's the idea." Snape's voice cracked across the air like a whip, giving Harry the chance of throwing Impedimenta towards the sound.

Snape ducked again, but with more care this time-- the curse had not been far off. Of course there was no reason to tell Potter that.

"Pathetic!" he called across at the boy that had gotten to his feet quite quickly-- the reflexes from the ball dodging kicking in. This time he had no time to complete the incantation he had intended to throw at Harry-- Harry's was fired first:

"Lepidae!" Harry's voice was sharp and steely, and his curse swift. He was again off-aim, but to Snape's surprise, he did not need to aim; the curse actually followed Snape's dodging, and homed in, and hit the potions master squarely. Pain from a hundred razors flashing white hot through every nerve end Snape possessed. It was not Crucio, but it was so sudden that Snape actually reacted to it: he screamed.

Harry gasped as he heard the cry of the Potions Master. It had never happened before in all the years he knew the controlled, proud man. He never expected that he would be the one to tear such a painful, dramatic reaction from the very definition of Icyness. Though he had many times fantasized about this moment, when Snape would wriggle on the ground before him, screaming his heart out, he did not relish in it as he thought he would. He was, instead, appalled. He felt horrified and grieved and could not tolerate to inflict this on the man further.

"Finite Incantatem!" he screamed and listened hard.

The scream had stopped, and in its place there was only heavy breathing. Harry walked towards the sound quickly.

"Professor?"

No reply. Harry felt creeping fear. Surely the curse could not have been this harsh on the man? Surely he was not... hurt? Seriously?

As he approached the man further, a slight acrid smell reached Harry's nostrils-- blood. Aw heck, he wasn't bleeding too, was he? It was only one off-the-top curse!

Harry reached out, touching the fallen form of his professor. He was so frantic that when cold, long fingers grabbed his wrist abruptly, he gasped audibly.

"The fact that your adversary doesn't reply does NOT mean he is down and out-- remember that Potter, and next time when you do get lucky like you just did, finish the job." Severus Snape's low, pained yet silky voice filled Harry's ears as his heart slowly returned to normal rates. Harry swallowed and smiled in relief, although what he had heard sounded like a reprimand.

"I thought I had seriously hurt you, sir." he said, his wrist still imprisoned in one of the potions master's hands.

"Your dream has not come true yet-- I was only surprised. The Lepidae curse is not 4th year material." Snape's voice was considerably softer. Harry wondered what the man's expression might be. Did he truly believe that Harry wanted to exert pain? Then again, why wouldn't he? Harry himself thought he wanted to exert pain only a few seconds earlier.

"Hermione and I have been practicing a lot of curses-- for the Triwizard Tournament, professor..." Harry shivered at the memory of the hated event, then added, "...and my dream is not to hurt you."

There was a lengthy pause, and gently the long, cool fingers released his wrist. The voice was painfully neutral now.

"I see. And what might your dream be?"

Harry frowned, wringing his fingers, as he thought for a proper answer.

"I want this to end-- so I can have a semblance of normality in my life." he finally said in a low, whispered voice, as if afraid that voicing it would mean that he would never be granted it.

Snape had been afraid that the boy would not answer, that long was his mulling over before he answered to his last question. It had not

been what the Potions Master expected the young Gryffindor to answer-- and in a way it shocked him.

He had not expected Harry Potter to have the same dream as himself.

"I see." Snape repeated, but this time he let his real voice surface. The shift in Harry's expression implied that the boy noticed. "Then let's start working for that dream of yours, shall we?"

His true voice was almost pleasant.

"Why were you fighting with Ssseverus?" Sasha asked when she was safely around Harry's wrist again. Harry smiled thinly.

"It was not a fight. It was a duel. I have to learn to fight without my vision."

Sasha's tongue shot out irritably.

"I thought I wass to help you with your ssight."

"And you will. That is where we are going." Harry said, already feeling bound to the over-conscientious young snake.

Minerva McGonagall was ready for Harry when he entered her office, guided by his wand. She smiled as he entered although she knew her smile would go unnoticed. But over the last few days, weeks, she had grown more proud of him than she had the last four years.

"Hello Harry. Have you brought your familiar with you?"

Harry smiled softly again.

"One of them." he said and lifted his left arm where Sasha was coiled like a multi-coloured bracelet. She tasted the air around the old witch, and found it comfortable enough to rest her head back on Harry's palm.

Minerva nodded.

"Very well. You understand that you should not use the bond we are about to establish between you and the snake--"

"Sasha," Harry corrected politely.

"-- yes, the bond between you and Sasha cannot be active for long periods of time, especially in the beginning. If you upkeep it for too long, you might exhaust Sasha to the point of severe illness or death." she instructed, and Harry swallowed and nodded gravely.

"I understand. I won't. It's only for Potions and Divination that I absolutely need sight, anyway."

"Very well." Minerva said. "Lift your wand and repeat after me, then when I tell you to, touch the tip of your wand to Sasha's head."

"Ah Severus, my loyal Death eater." Voldemort called after he was done initiating a new recruit. Snape had already lost his appetite. He stepped forward and knelt.

"My lord."

"What have you to report to me from Hogwarts and Harry Potter?"

Snape launched his well-rehearsed report.

"Potter is alive and healed from all injuries, my lord, but he cannot be healed of his blindness. Dumbledore called on the werewolf Lupin to try and cheer the boy up, but he is sinking deeper and deeper into depression. He is growing weak with pity and guilt, my lord. Dumbledore wants to teach him to live with blindness, but the progress is very slow."

Voldemort was pleased. Snape was spared the Cruciatus, and the meeting ended in relative peace. But when all the Death eaters were gone, Voldemort summoned someone.

"Wormtail. You shall serve me once more."

The balding man slithered towards him, grovelling and sniffing.

"Any...anything, my lord, all for you." he stuttered, and Voldemort made a grimace of disgust.

"Silence. You shall go back to Hogwarts-- and see how Harry Potter is faring. You shall report all to me. You have two days."

And the fat rat with the glowing paw scuttered off quickly, fearing Hogwarts but dreading Tom Riddle.

Remus walked in Harry's room slightly nervous. Harry smiled up at him from where he was sitting with several potions ingredients before him. Sasha was coiled on the desk, glancing at the items and hissing occasionally. Harry looked the happiest he had ever been in all this summer.

"I can see it all through Sasha, Remus! I... I can see through her!" he said with such happiness that did not leave any room for other emotions even in Remus. He grinned from ear to ear as he hugged Harry and petted the snake, which seemed to enjoy the stroking of the top of her head.

Harry quickly bent over the snake and muttered a charm. The colourful snake hissed and coiled itself around Harry's left wrist as usual. The different tilt in his head told Remus that Harry's link with the Sasha was inactivated.

"Why did you inactivate the charm?"

"She needs her rest. If I don't let up the charm after an hour or two, she gets very drowsy. I don't want to make her uncomfortable. I mean, she's so nice about it." Harry smiled softly as his hands felt around for the fold-in cane and took it firmly in their grasp.

"Oh. Well, there's an owl for you. It came in my office, but the letter is for you." Remus said, and the way he said it, Harry's face paled.

"It's from Snuffles, isn't it?"

Remus nodded, then remembered that that was not an answer Harry could perceive anymore so he said:

"I'm afraid so. Here, open it."

Harry did, and then waved his wand over the letter so that it would be read in his conscious when he touched the surface, just like one's eyes read it to one's mind. He had found that the Read-Me feather was slightly too loud for his tastes...

Dear Harry,

why haven't you written me in so long? I heard you are not in Privet Drive anymore-- no in fact, I -saw- that you weren't there. The Dursleys are some pretty scared muggles and what they were talking of reminded me far too much of Deatheaters. Are you alright? I hope my owl reaches you well and sound. I am so worried. Please answer me, even with just a note to let me know what is happening. Not knowing is torture.

your Gfather,

Snuffles

Harry drew in a big breath.

"He will not like what I have to tell him. Maybe I shouldn't."

Remus was thoughtful.

"It will be worse if he reads it off a newspaper when Hogwarts is alive with students." he said.

Harry made his decision.

He took a new roll of parchment, spread it, charmed the ink, took a deep breath, and started dictating.

Hee hee. How is THIS for a cliffhanger? *chuckles*

As for my reviewers:

shitsumon: Glad you like Sasha! heh. About that Skeeter cow... *Hermione grins ferociously* we don't know yet. heh. As for Sirius... *points up* he is about to find out. *hands you cookie* You noticed about Snape's aversion to child abuse. Kudos. I thought that was way too subtle for anyone to notice after all. I was giving up hope! *L* As for Fudge and the ministry, this will wait until September.

NightSpear: Quidditch will be in the list of 'to dos'. I have some ideas, but they are still hatching. I am glad you liked the chapter. :)

Darkhorse8100: *chuckles* we'll see bout Braille... as for Sasha;s uses... there's a good idea.

Huntress Angel: that he did, and that he is. *chuckles*

Lirael: I don't want to give him much more than JK has already given him. I am afraid that then he won't be Harry, really. Besides it's cooler to be powerful with what he already has. :)

Barbara: he will get one-- I doubt he will have a choice in the matter. *laughs* but I don't know for how long. Sasha is his main helper tho.

Lei Dumbledore: I am glad! I was so nervous.

kateydidn't: right you are! As for his eyes, no. They stay as they are in animagus form.

MegOfAllTrades: eh, I don't think he can avoid it. *chuckles* Thank you so much.

Karen: a familiar is an animal a wizard has a bond with, basically. Snape gave Harry Sasha the snake. :)

Jordan: questions answered today!

Kaat Shadow Lover: *hands you coffee* neither wrote, cos neither knew what exactly to write, you see.

Angel Baby: though I am not too keen on the Twins, I will give them a shot, just for you. *L*

emma: *is flattered* thank you bunchies :) As for your question, no I am not blind and I haven't had close contact with a blind person. I am only a psychology major, and I have read a lot of case studies... then I try to put myself in their shoes, and see what I would do if I were blind... and go from there. I try to update as fast as possible. I am glad you find this somewhat realistic ;D

Zeynel: all shall be shown. As for initial reactions, I'm afraid that's a bit hard to fit into this as it's mainly Harry/Severus POVs. He is not turning Daredevil-- I have not seen that yet. And I wouldn't want him to have infra-red vision. *L*

walks in, sneezes into a hanky, offers it back to Snape who makes a face and nods for her to keep it ugh. What do you know. I am sick AGAIN. Occupational hazard of being a teacher. *Snape sneers* a MUGGLE teacher. *rhe*

Anyhow. I am nervous about this chapter. I have never before written Sirius Black. I am not... practiced in the guy. So please don't hit me. Oh, and just a note-- I don't think we are told Madam Hooch's name, and so I christened her Matty. (means 'eye' in greek. I think it could fit)

Anyhow... Chapter 11. *hits play*

Severus Snape was walking from the quidditch pitch to the castle, brow furrowed. It was mid-August now, and in two weeks the school year would start. Two weeks before he would have to once again become even stealthier about his true colours, about helping Potter, about being a protector rather than a threat to the great mass of the frivolous potential futures of today's wizarding world.

And he had a growing suspicion that the Golden Boy would want to still play Quidditch.

He was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he did not notice the environment around him, or a large black labrador running up to him with speed. He looked up only when he heard a subtle 'pop', but then it was too late: he was already grabbed by the neck and smashed against the stone outer wall of the castle.

"What do you mean blind!? What did you do to him, -Snape-?" Black's eyes were dark with malice, his face twisted into a mask of pure anger and as he spat Snape's name he pushed in his grip. Snape grabbed at the fugitive's hand to allow some blood to go up to the brain and some air to go down to the lungs. Then he proceeded to sneer at him.

"Obviously what you have been incapable of doing-- reconstructing his life." he said and then kicked swiftly and mercilessly towards Black's groin. Black released him with a moan. Snape's sardonic

expression gave way to a hateful scowl as he took out his wand and pointed it to the curled up man, ready to inflict more pain.

"Sirius, Severus, break it up!" Remus' voice sounded like a blast from the past-- he had called the same thing so many times when they were still students. Snape looked up, the scowl still there, and saw the werewolf running up to them both. He grabbed Sirius just in time to hold him back from lunging at the potions master again. Which was not very easy as the fugitive was livid at apparently both Snape and Lupin.

"Why didn't you tell me Moony? you knew all this time, and I have to learn it from a letter that is not even in my godson's handwriting?"

"This is exactly why I didn't tell you, Padfoot. Harry has developed beautifully in many ways, and Severus did the most part. Calm down-- someone might see you. Dumbledore is waiting for us, and Harry, in his office." Remus managed to say while struggling with the taller man. At the mention of Harry's name, the pop was heard again and the big black dog bolted in the right direction.

It left both Snape and Remus bringing up the rear, rearranging their robes so that they wouldn't look too dishevelled. They made sure they did not meet each other's gaze.

And neither noticed the rat skulking off at top speed.

Harry's hands were gripping and releasing nervously the handle of Hermione's cane. It had come to be a tool that Harry appreciated almost as much as his wand. He heard the jingle of china as Dumbledore was pouring tea into cups.

"Tea?" he requested in his usual amiable manner. Harry smiled wryly.

"If Sirius is about to come in--"

As if on cue, the big dog barged in, popped into Sirius Black and virtually threw himself at the young Gryffindor, almost smothering him up in the enormous hug, tightly against his chest.

"Harry, tell me this is all a big joke, tell me you are alright.." Sirius kept babbling as Harry hugged him back at first, but then tried to break free as he found he was needing more air than he could get in his current position.

"Dear Sirius, I believe you can get your reassurance better if you let young Harry breathe." Dumbledore said kindly, and Sirius gently released Harry, chagrined.

Harry bit his lip, and binked a couple of times, fingering the handle of the cane again. He smiled thinly at the direction of his godfather.

"I am okay, Sirius, really I am. I said as much in the letter I sent you."

He heard Sirius take in his breath sharply-- Harry assumed that by now he had scrutinised him enough to take in the unfocused glance, the lack of glasses and the bandaged wand-hand. He took in a deep breath.

"However... I really am blind. It's not as... as bad as it sounds." he offered, but it sounded lame even to him. The silence that ensued in the room was very unsettling-- Harry had no way to fathom Sirius' expression, no way of knowing what was going through the man's mind, no way of preparing himself for his reaction. It made him queazy. Especially since he heard Snape's and Remus' footsteps entering, and he knew by definition that the chemistry would escalate to explosive levels exponentially.

"Sirius, Harry has been making us all proud these past few weeks." Remus' voice.

"Who did this to you?" Sirius' voice had, if that ever could be possible, more venom than Snape himself. Harry shivered.

"Sirius... it doesn't matter."

"It DOES matter! People have to pay!" Sirius growled.

"I assume that you are the one to make them?" Snape's voice was dripping acid.

"I do believe that this is not what young Harry would benefit from." Dumbledore's voice echoed like a steady anchor in Harry's ears. Immediately the atmosphere changed from dangerous to cool.

"Perhaps Harry and Sirius have some catching up to do." Dumbledore added.

Snape huffed, muttering something that Harry's developing hearing caught as 'as long as he doesn't smother him', and heard Remus say that he would be around. The two wizards left, and Dumbledore sat up.

"You can use my office for however long you wish of course."

"Headmaster, if you don't mind, would it be safe to go out somewhere?" Harry asked urgently, a plan forming vaguely in his mind-- he had at all costs to impress his godfather.

Dumbledore hesitated, then said:

"You may use the Covered Gardens. I am sure Poppy and Matty won't mind. Use the floo from your room to go there."

Sirius watched Harry as he quickly and deftly directed himself towards his room, tapping gently in front of him with the light-coloured cane. No sound was emitted, but it seemed to aid Harry effectively. He was somewhat surprised, and, he discovered guiltily, a little disappointed at seeing Harry so agile-- and happy. Of course he was happy.

It only bothered him that Snape had aided him to reach this level, and not himself. If he had not been in his dog form, following his godson, he would have scowled.

Harry was nervous. He knew that Sirius' rivalry with Snape would not help matters. He had tried in his letter to present his situation in the best terms. But presently, Harry doubted if his hot headed godfather had even bothered to read all of his letter. As soon as they were in Harry's room and the door was closed, Sirius popped back to his human version and sighed, still watching Harry warily.

"Don't you need any help with that?" he asked as Harry's fingers traced the mantel of the fireplace and snaked around the floo pot.

"No, it's alright." Harry pressed himself to make his voice as carefree as possible. As he uncovered the floo pot, Sasha's head peeked from under his robe's sleeve, tasting the air. Sirius jumped and gasped.

"That's a CORAL snake!" he squeaked, his voice an octave higher. It made Harry want to giggle.

"She's Sasha. My familiar, and when I need to, my eyes."

"She's POISONOUS!" Sirius made a step and Sasha's body coiled tighter around Harry's wrist, as she bared her pointy fangs at the fugitive.

"Yes, and you are agitating her into thinking you are an enemy." Harry rolled his eyes, threw in the floo and shouted 'Covered Gardens'.

When Sirius emerged through, he still was going on and on about Sasha.

"She could bite you in your sleep! You don't let her sleep with you, do you?"

"She prefers to sleep coiled up at the foot of the bed, where most covers are piled up. Really, Sirius, she is not danger to me or Professor Snape wouldn't have--"

"Snape gave you that snake? Get rid of it now!" Sirius cried and made a move as if to detach the multicoloured bracelet of a snake from Harry's hand.

Harry found that perhaps Sirius would need some information hammered into him rather than coaxed into him. He got out his wand and said:

"Pago". Sirius instantly froze in his position, but he was still able to talk.

"Snape also taught me how to be able to pull this off. And Remus how not to be afraid of the darkness. And Dumbledore how to still believe in my own self." Harry circled Sirius' still form, talking strongly, almost harshly, and each name was a blow to the fugitive. He asked meekly, eyes downcast although he knew that his expression would be lost on Harry now.

"Do you need me at all?"

That checked Harry's speed, the voice, the hue and the slight tremble he heard in Sirius' voice, making him feel ridiculously stronger than the older wizard was. He was, for the first time since his blindness, in a position to support rather than be supported.

"Finite Incantatem. I need you Sirius... to show me that you can still treat me as you always have... That I still have a chance at being Harry... and not someone even more... special."

Sirius felt like crying in happiness as well as sorrow, and he embraced his godson once more, then smirked.

"You look great Harry." he glanced about. "and wow. We are in Pomfrey's and Hooch's secret garden. What didn't I and your dad give to find them when we were here." he said wistfully, and Harry laughed, relieved.

"Then tell me what it looks like already!" Harry nudged his godfather playfully, and Sirius steered him down the path of the tropical-looking

gardens, describing everything as graphically and amusingly as humanly -and inhumanly- possible.

"Alright, Potter. I have been discussing this with Flitwick. I liked the homing in quality of your Lepidae curse-- and I think it would be more efficient to find a way to apply this to anything you might want to hurl at an adversary." Snape said to the boy standing opposite him at the ready.

Harry nodded. Professor Flitwick had arrived in Hogwarts about two days before Sirius, but Harry had steered clear of the tiny professor solely for the reason that he seemed to hear covert sniffing every time the professor was nearby. Snape continued.

"You can charm your wand to fire off a spell and have it home in on the target. All you need to do is say 'Ento' before the charm's or curse's words."

"It's that easy?" Harry was almost incredulous.

Snape smirked.

"Gryffindor luck holds out, Potter. Yes, it is that easy. There is only one catch."

Harry snorted, and twirled the wand in his hands.

"It draws more energy from you-- you get tired quickly. So it is best you don't use it flippantly, or with silly curses. Flitwick advises not to use it more than 3 successive times."

"Or what?" Harry asked.

"Or you die and the bad guys win." Snape said with sordid amusement.

Harry had to laugh.

"Also, Potter-- I have decided to make this more interesting, as it has been some time that the duel was solely one-on-one."

Harry's eyebrows shot up to his hairline as he heard the familiar footsteps-- Remus Lupin.

"Re-- Professor Lupin?" he blurted out.

"Hi Harry. I thought I'd drop by." Remus' gentle voice held excitement.

"You are duelling with two adversaries as of now, Potter. Never expect Voldemort to be fair."

"Or forgiving..." Remus added and shot the first curse at Harry, who heard it in time and jumped out of the way.

Harry scowled as always, but he was overtly excited. As he dodged Snape's curse, he hurled the disarming spell towards the muttering he was hearing.

"Forget the Expelliarmus already! You never aim that well!" Snape's voice snapped and Harry growled the first curse that came to mind.

"Fagouro!"

Snape nearly dropped his wand from the wave of itchiness that hit him, and Harry turned to Remus while the potions master was busy...

...only to hear the last syllable of a curse coming his way. Reflexively, he casted a shield-- but not quickly enough. While the pulse spell Remus threw at Harry didn't completely throw him against the wall, it did manage to throw him on his back.

He heard the clacking of the heel, pointed his wand that way, and to be extra sure, he casted:

"Ento Expelliarmus!" and there was a grunt and a wand flew into his hand. He grinned, but moments later he found himself in a bodybind.

"You rejoice too soon, Potter-- got to work on that arrogance. Or is it Gryffindor stupidity?" he heard as he struggled.

"Release the boy Severus-- he did quite well for a first time, and he managed to curse you accurately and disarm me. He could have had us both."

"He COULD. But he didn't. Let this be a lesson to you, Potter-- once you gain leverage, you NEVER let it go, or it will never come back." he heard Snape's rather irritated voice, and Harry was released. He got up.

"Fine, then, a re-match? and I will direct something more substantial than a tickle curse at you." Harry snorted.

"You bet this is not over--" there was a grunt that stunted Snape's talk, and a clutter of a wand. Harry frowned as he heard Remus' shuffling feet go to where he calculated the potions master to be standing.

"Professor?"

"It's okay Harry, don't worry." Remus' voice implied nothing of the sort.

Harry approached, and somehow he knew, from the intake of Snape's breaths, to the slight gritting of his teeth that he heard.

"It's the mark. Isn't it?"

"Right on Potter. Now get lost. Go find your puppy."

Remus whispered to him to obey, and with a sigh, Harry summoned Hermione's wand to him, went to retrieve Sasha, and exited. He knew the potions master could take care of himself.

Then why did he feel particularly bad about this?

Voldemort turned as a pop was heard and Wormtail approached, hunched and trembling.

"Well, my faithful sservant?" he asked, while petting Nagini.

"Ha..ha-harry Potter is blind, indeed, m'Lord..." the man ventured.

"And..?"

"And... and he's being trained... by Snape and.. and Lupin, m'Lord."

"And what of Snape?"

"He... he said to Black... he.. he arrived to Hogwarts too, my Lord... so he said to Black that... that he... he was reconstructing P-p-potter's life, m'Lord. And Lupin said... that Snape... had helped the most, my Lord."

"That is not promising... but did you actually see Snape help Potter?"

Wormtail went ashen.

"I did-- didn't stay, my Lord... I did not... want to be noticed." Wormtail managed to say through his chattering teeth. "But... but he did sound sincere..." he tried to add in his desperation.

Voldemort clicked his tongue.

"You did not serve me as well as I would like... and I do not tolerate failure." he purred, gazing into Nagini's cold eyes. Wormtail fell on the floor, grovelling.

"However, you did offer me another... shall we call it... point of view. So I am not too cross. Crucio."

hee hee. That's that.

Innocence: I hope wormtail and sirius were satisfactory.

Koneko Tenshi: That is definately not good. *laughs* I am glad you like Sasha. She can be temperamental. *gets cookies* always a pleasure.

venus4280: Good points! And all valid! Voldie does not trust snape. Sirius wasn't at the b-day party cos well... nobody had yet told him, knowing how he'd react. He went to the dursleys on Harry's bday, and found out he wasn't there, and contacted Remus.

Dark Storm: I am so glad you approve. :) Vernon couldn't care less about relinquishing Harry... just not in the state Harry was at the time, he was... rather taken aback and afraid. A day earlier, he would have had no problem.

Lady Lunar Phoenix: Trust wormtail not to do his job right. *L* As for Snape stripping: he threatened me at wandpoint that was as far as he'd go. *sly grin* at least in public.

Darkhorse: I am not sure... but let's say they do have enough differentiated vision to help in potions and the like. Heh. I hope my sirius satisfied you.

Prairie Flower 617: Yes, they are. *evil smile* Nope, I am not crossing HP with DD... I have not yet seen the movie, either. *pouts*

Phoenix Flight: I know what you mean. I wish I could find another similar story, too. Thank you for your compliment :)

Kaat Shadow Lover: *eats it up delightfully* When I meant Severus changed his voice, I mean he let himself drop some guards, in short, he allowed his voice to be less harsh and more human, truthful. Not that he changed a voice like he switched it off or on. The different tilt in Harry's head implied that he again depended on sound, whereas before he was looking through the snakes eyes. He does see everything through Sasha's POV. Sasha LOVES rat tartar. :) As for Sirius... I will try. And cheese cake next time, please :)

Sakura Blossom: *watches you bounce happily* I try to write as fast as possible-- but I was so nervous bout Sirius I was postponing all the time. I am glad you approve of Sasha. :)

Melissa Lupin: I was tempted to have it work out smoothly like that... but then... well it just wouldn't have drama, would it?

Zardi: I worship RJ Anderson. I did not take the ide from her tho, although I did toy with the owl idea. She rocks!

Reignbow: I could... but that would drain Harry when he will need his magic energy for other stuff.

Temporary Insanity: Hey, we will find out on Chapter 12!

phreakreader: I am glad you like my Harry! Thank you for your review and your compliment.

Katy999: I am sorry! I am telling you something now :) His other familiar is Hedwig! *laughs* the canon familiar.

Myk: *L* thanks! *hands you a cookie*

Zardiphillian Beryllix: hee hee. Glad you like Sasha. I hope Ron stays that way.

kateydidn't: I have read it, and LOVED it. And I think your question's answered. Hope you liked Sirius.

Lee Lee Potter: soon, dear, soon. *chuckles* it's HARD to make Snape smile.

Mindel: of course he will! But at strategic times. Heh. As for Snape, he will... eventually. I hope. heh.

Snape walks in with a -foul- expression, carrying her and dropping her in the armchair I'm better from my cold, but now my bad knee protests. Do you see a pattern here? *Snape hands her coffee* However, the perfect mood for what I am about to write hehe.

I am glad my Sirius wasn't blatantly off. And I am over 300 reviews!!
parties thank you SO VERY MUCH!

Snape clears throat Also, my companion here reminds me that I have an announcement to make: This little fic here is going to be translated in French by Catherine! Cool! (cos I could never be bothered to do it) hehe. Look for it, all those that feel more comfortable with that language. And a BIG APPLAUSE TO CATHERINE!

ok. Chapter 12. *hits play*

Snape apparated in the non-descript, mouldy house that dark gatherings were taking place when they did not involve large numbers of muggles. He looked around, feeling the hot puffs of his breath spreading beneath his mask. His heart always pounded like a rabbit's when he was among true Death Eaters-- it always had ever since he returned to them after a meeting with an old wizard with a long white beard. Today was no different.

Nor was there any reason for anything else to be different.

Tom Riddle was sitting in his large armchair-- this throne, as many had taken to calling it, and was watching the cloaked figures gather up. Snape noticed that there were only about three or four besides himself there. Not everyone was summoned to this. Snape's brow furrowed. What was so special about tonight that not all Death Eaters should be privy to?

"My loyal Death Eaterssss..." Tom drew out the s's again, and Snape felt a shiver down his spine-- that was never a good indication.

"This is a gathering only for my besst... and mosst loyal followersss... feel priviledged." Tom drawled, and everyone bowed and said their

thank yous in unison, with as much gusto as they could muster over their uneasiness.

"Ssseverus.... my loyal Potionsss Master...." Tom turned his gaze to Snape as he stepped forward, his heart beating so fast he was afraid the dark lord would hear.

"My Lord."

The Cruciatus hit Snape so hard and fast he was at first too surprised to feel it. What had happened? Why was he being punished? Had he been called to die?

Then the pain kicked in and all thoughts brushed away in one great wave of suffering. Snape screamed, the mask falling off his face, and stopped only when he was dropped on the floor. The rest of the Death Eaters were looking on, stunned, and somewhat scared. Were they all going to go through what Snape was?

"You betrayed me, Ssseveruss..." Voldemort said, and Snape's blood froze to the point he did not feel the after effects of the Cruciatus.

"No my Lord. Never." he said, trying to get to a kneeling position.

Vainly. The Cruciatus hit him again, and Voldemort nodded for the rest of the Death Eaters to join. Relieved that they were there not to be tortured, but to torture, the Death Eaters complied, to the point that Snape's scream could not contain the man's agony, and therefore faded. Blood came from the potions master's mouth, and nostrils, his eyes rolled back into his skull and the convulsions became so dramatic that bones were heard protesting.

Then, the curse was let up.

"Make him able to talk." the cold voice ordered from far away, and some charm gave Snape painful awareness that his body was wrecked and the pain had not even begun to sink in.

"You failed me, Severuss... that hurts me-- and I have to show you how much." Voldemort said silkily.

"No, my Lord... how... could ...I have done so...?" Snape asked faintly, knowing that it was best trying not to attempt debating on a subject before Tom Riddle specified it-- otherwise, it would show that he had things to hide as it was.

"What have you to report to me from Hogwarts and Harry Potter?" Voldemort asked lazily.

Snape's mind reeled with pain and horror. Had he been seen? But how? When?

Nagini hissed something to her master, and Snape's eyes flashed as he replied.

"My lord... Du-- dumbledore has ordered me to... help Potter learn to duel... sightless..." he gasped for breath, "which is... most fortunate... because... I crush his self-esteem daily... and teach him nothing of consequence... the boy will be... inept when it comes to... real battle."

"I am not sure I believe you." Voldemort said and spat out another curse. Snape screamed again as his skin burst along the veins radiating from his dark mark, rendering his left hand useless. Blood streamed down his hand and on the floor, hot and acrid.

"It... it is the truth, my Lord." Snape gasped.

"What else?" Voldemort purred.

"S...irius Black has... come to Hogwarts.. my Lord..." Snape grunted, trying to press down on his left arm but finding out that his right hand's fingers were broken in odd ways.

Voldemort nodded to himself.

"Nothing more?"

"Dumble...dore... connected... Potter to his owl... as a seeing eye familiar... the boy is... now overly dependent on the owl." Snape said, wild with hope.

Indeed, Voldemort's eyes flashed with the new piece of information that he obviously had not received.

"I see. Are you telling me the truth?" the dark lord asked, and Crucioed Snape again.

"Yes, my lord." Snape sighed when he was able to.

"Are you still loyal to me?" Voldemort smiled and spelled Snape to shoot up in the air then freefall back down again.

"Yes... my.. lord..." Snape muttered desperately.

"Even through all the pain you are feeling?" Voldemort persisted, and made Snape careen into a fireplace and onto the poker. Snape grunted and managed to say through the jumble of his words:

"You... deserve all... my ... lord..."

Voldemort straightened up.

"This is the level of loyalty I expect from all of you. Let Severus be an example to you all.

And the meeting was called done.

Harry moved quickly towards the infirmary, his cane barely tapping, his wand tugging him swiftly towards the right direction. He did not need to know-- he had witnessed it first hand. Sirius trotted alongside him and accompanied Harry in the infirmary as Snuffles. Dumbledore was already there, and Poppy was just walking away from the bed. Harry wished he could see their expressions.

"Headmaster?"

"Oh, Harry. Did you know I was already here?"

"I heard your whisper to Madam Pomfrey, sir. Is he..." Harry said quietly.

"He is going to survive." Dumbledore assured gently, but his voice was strained, Harry could discern.

Harry nodded. Snuffles' muzzle found its way into Harry's palm, and Harry felt the emotional support that his godfather wanted to offer him. It strengthened him.

"Severus will not wake for a while, Harry, I am afraid," Dumbledore's voice was calming although he was not giving good news, "but he had scheduled for you to go to Diagon alley for your supplies with him tomorrow. I believe he would not like you not to go."

Harry frowned.

"Sir, I don't feel ready." Harry said quietly, his fingers rubbing Snuffles' ears without thinking.

"I think you are. You will not be alone. In any case I was apprehensive about you being seen with Severus in the first place-- perhaps things are for the best the way they are. I am informed that the Weasley family will be doing their purchases tomorrow as well. Molly would love to meet you there."

"I will be seen with a cane." Harry persisted.

Dumbledore sighed.

"That will not be concealed for much longer, I am afraid, my boy. However, you do not need to use the cane if that distresses you-- I believe you have a trusty seeing-eye dog in Snuffles. I am certain he is perfectly trained for the job." he said, his voice a little more optimistic than before. Snuffles barked once to voice his assertion. Harry had to smile.

"And if needed, I will have Sasha." Harry said, and the colourful snake hissed affectionately from around his wrist. He was not using

her as his eyes-- after the nightmare he found his mind reluctant to connect to any other anytime soon. Harry got up.

"I will go get ready... and I will be back again tomorrow." the boy said, his tone implying that he would not leave so soon from the potions master's bedside.

Walking back to his room, he asked Sasha in Parseltongue:

"How was he, Sasha?"

"Very hurt, Harry... sssuffered a lot. Ssssleaving, and bandaged."

Harry said nothing, and when later in his room Sirius asked, he did not tell him what his dialogue with Sasha had been.

Instead, he turned his attention to tomorrow's trial: Diagon Alley.

Molly Weasley had had enough time to control her tears and swelling emotions at the news of Harry's predicament; she had also heard Ron's feedback about how adept Harry had been, and she was rather surprised not to hear teary accounts of a terrified boy. She therefore did not know what to expect, waiting for Harry Potter along with Fred, George, Ron and Ginny to go for the annual school supplies. Ron nudged her.

"Whatever you do mom, don't sniffle. Harry hears sniffing miles away."

Fred and George had already idolised Harry's new abilities.

"D'you think we could have him test some sound pranks? You know, something like 'whisper-and-blow-up' toffee, or--"

"I will not have such talk about poor Harry from you two!" Mrs Weasley snapped at Fred who grinned at his mother sheepishly-- however, the mischievous spark did not leave either his or George's eyes.

"Hello, Mrs. Weasley." came the familiar, somewhat low voice to Mrs Weasley's left, so suddenly that the whole Weasley brood jumped. Harry chuckled, and Snuffles barked in amusement as well.

"Harry, dear! I didn't hear you coming!" the witch exclaimed and hugged Harry close to her-- a hug that Harry always relished, as it was the closest to a mother's touch that he would ever get. Harry almost giggled like a child during peekaboo.

"Well, few people do, lately. I don't like to hear my own footsteps." he smiled softly as he broke off the hug and his hand tightened around the leash on Snuffles. Mrs. Weasley lost her words, now noticing the differences in the teen: his eyes, though sparkling, were unfocused and unmoving, staring at some middle distance-- the light did not make him react when it hit his face, like before. His head was subtly, slightly tilted to the side and upwards, as if poised for better listening. Fortunately, the pause in her words and actions was filled by Ron:

"Harry, mate it's so good to see you, and Snuffles, too!"

"Yes, he's helping me around-- didn't want to get Hermione's cane out here yet." Harry smiled as Snuffles wagged his tail.

"Harry, how cool, you can sneak up anywhere-- is it true you can even hear Snape coming?" George said excitedly and Harry smirked.

"Well at least Filch is not going to be a problem." he said, but he avoided any talk about Snape. Not while the man was lying in bed struggling to keep body and soul together.

"You look great, Harry." Ginny said simply, and Harry beamed-- the simple words warming his heart effectively.

"Thanks, Gin." he said quietly again.

"Well, don't let's linger here, boys. We have shopping to do, things to tend to." Mrs Weasley had found her bossiness as well as her voice in the short time her children bought her, and successfully did not show any difference in treatment as far as Harry was concerned. Sirius was extra careful guiding Harry around, determined to be far

more effective than the cane. Harry was somewhat silent, as at first the wave of sounds overwhelmed him.

To his pleasant surprise, Harry found that he had much less trouble distinguishing between sounds and he adjusted to the hubbub of Diagon Alley much faster than he had from the quiet of his room to the rest of Hogwarts castle. That realisation filled him with joy and heightened self-esteem.

"I don't need refill for Potions, I have already all that I need, curtesy of Snape." Harry said as he and the Weasleys went through their lists of school supplies. The twins leaned over Harry conspiratorily.

"You wouldn't happen to have access to Snape's stash, now would you? Or have heard him whisper his password or--"

"Eh, Snape doesn't even let me into his dungeons, much less his personal office." Harry smirked as he heard both twins exhale disappointedly.

"But don't worry, it's much easier to sneak into other secret places..." Harry added, thinking of the secret garden, and hoping he would not have to break that rule and take the terrible duo there. In any case, he succeeded in cheering the twins enough.

"Okay, now for our books." Ginny said, and Snuffles started to pull Harry towards the correct direction along with the rest. Harry bit his lip thoughtfully. Hearing Ron walking beside him, and Mrs Weasley occupied in shaking her two older sons down about their mischief, Harry leaned to the side.

"Say Ron..."

"Yes, Harry?"

"While in the bookshop, mind warning me if any kind of... eh..."

"Don't worry Harry. I'll warn you of any reporters. Hermione said you might be feeling nervous about that. None will get past us Weasleys." Ron's voice was full of the usual bravado, and Harry smiled.

"Where is 'Mione, anyway?"

"She's busy-- letting a ... certain bug go free. Under specific provisos, as she said." Ginny said in answer, and all three teens laughed upon entering the bookshop.

In choosing his books, Harry established the mind link with Sasha, to see the titles and covers and get them as effcinetly as he did before. Ron kept his distance from the colourful snake and Harry's wrist, whereas Fred and George were simply fascinated, and then asked Harry if Sasha would give them any of her poison. Sasha was vehement in her negative answer. Harry stopped the charm as soon as he was done, overtly worried that he might cause harm to his serpentine companion.

"Well, well. If it isn't Potty and the Weasels." the drawling voice was unmistakable. Harry scowled as he turned towards where it was heard. He heard Ron bristle nearby and Ginny suck in her breath, and behind him the twins shift their weight aggressively. Mrs. Weasley was busy paying for Ginny's books.

"Malfoy, you really should choose another routine. This is far too tiresome." Harry said in a staccato manner that surprised both the blonde Slytherin and the Weasleys. In fact, Draco did not know what to answer for a while, and Harry muttered 'let's go Snuffles', to exit. That brought Draco back. He sneered.

"Aw, how quaint. You got a common mongrel as a consolation present for being blinder than a bat!"

Harry, Ron, Ginny, Fred, George and Mrs. Weasley coming with the books all froze. Snuffles turned and bared his teeth, held back only because Harry kept a strong grip on the leash. Harry smiled a smile that Ron would swear he had seen many times on the Potions Master's face.

"As a matter of fact, Malfoy, I haven't got my consolation present yet." he said flippantly, with that steely quality his voice had at times. In fractions of seconds, his wand was out. "Murkus." he grinned with the

satisfaction of justice served, as the laughter erupted around him. It did not matter that he could not see how Draco's face suddenly and squarely received a large lump of mud. It sufficed that he heard the results. "Now, I can say I have gotten my consolation present." Harry said smugly, and exited before Draco could react at all.

Harry returned to the infirmary the same day in the afternoon. He was alone, if one excluded Sasha, permanently coiled around his wrist. He listened hard, but heard nothing more than the rhythmic, gentle breathing from the bed that he was coming for. Apparently Poppy was not in the infirmary. Harry walked silently to the potions master's bedside and fingered about for the chair. When he found it, he pulled it close and sat down.

"I am not tired, Harry." Sasha hissed quietly. Harry considered it, but found he did not want to actually see Severus Snape hurt and broken, after all. He liked to keep the image of the audacious, controlled man in his mind.

"It's alright, Sasha." he hissed back and for a long time he simply heard the Potions Master breathe, trying to sort out his feelings. He had witnessed every single moment of the process that had landed Snape in the infirmary-- had felt part of his pain, although not enough. Harry's respect for his stern teacher had increased during that vision. He could not believe that Snape could undergo so much pain, suffering, fear, and not give him away, to have the clarity of mind to distort the truth to have Voldemort relax, to protect the Boy-Who-Lived so that when the time comes he would have the element of surprise on his side. Harry marvelled and felt his heart go out to the limp form he could feel laid out before him.

Without thinking, he reached out with his wand hand, the right hand which he used the most. His fingertips, touched flesh. It was not clammy, it was not repulsive. It was warm-- too warm. Perhaps the Potions Master had some fever. His fingertips travelled down the stern forehead, the aquiline nose--

"Are you having fun, Potter?" the voice was hoarse and weak, yet still silky and challenging. Harry immediately retracted his hand as if caught doing something he shouldn't. He heard Snape sneer softly.

"You are probably triumphant, aren't you... the mighty greasy bat finally down and--"

"Stop." Harry said softly, hurt by these words simply because he was given an insight he did not expect. "Please, stop, professor. I... admire you."

Snape did not expect to hear that from anyone-- much less from the Golden Boy. It sufficed to make him open his eyes and turn to look at the teen sitting in the chair. Harry was hunched, head tilted slightly forwards, his eyes alive with emotion. Snape was certain the boy was holding back tears. He was unsure, and so he said nothing. Harry continued.

"Nobody could do what you did, sir. I... am sorry I was the reason for it."

"The world does not revolve around you, Potter." Snape snapped at the boy, but his voice was almost amial.

A long silence ensued, then Harry swallowed.

"Sir..."

"Still woken up by you, Potter."

"In two days school starts."

"How perceptive of you."

"They will ask how I became... blind."

Another pause.

"Least said, soonest mended, Potter. Rely on adolescent imagination." Snape said as he shifted in bed painfully.

Harry smiled. In the rest of the half-hour that Harry stayed before Madam Pomfrey came to 'ensure the Professor's rest', nothing else was said.

Nothing else was needed.

That's that! Upcoming chapter: September 1! Weeeee!

Phoenix Flight: Hmmm. I doubt Snape would do anything for Sirius' benefit willingly. We'll see.

Katy999: Yes, I am planning on using JK's hint about Petey's wizard debt. :) You predict well. *smiles widely* and Voldemort is not exactly keen to depend on a gryffindor, I should think.

Jordan: I hope the answer was to your satisfaction?

Lady coriel: The idea has merit...

Kaat Shadow Lover: *shares cheesecake with Snape* mmmm delicious! Yes, Voldemort knows, but he is not certain, and Snape still is the top potions brewer... and so he tries to scare him into loyalty. Sirius doesn't mind being Harry's guidedog-- he is competing with the cane. *laugh* School starts on chapter 13. And that is NOT some kind of omen. *smirks* Oh, and some more cheesecake please-- Snape ate my share. *glare at Snape*

Raging Silence22: Voldie will be much surprised when I am done with Harry.) As for sneezing, I did-- and Snape gave me extra powerful pepper up potion. *L*

Lirael: hm. You really want me not to turn Draco bad in this one?

Zardiphillian Berillyx: *laughs* yes, it does seem to get him to his senses, no?

Mikee: Sasha has voiced that desire many times. Eventually, I may allow her. But not soon.

Melissa Lupin: Yes, there might be some point in time Snape remembers his rendez-vous with Vernon :)

Angel Baby: Harry can't save Severus at this time. Be patient. :)

sk8reagle: I don't think so. I am assuming Snape is not aware of Wormtail's existence except by word of mouth.

epholge: I promised, as close to canon as possible. I'll do what I can. :)

Kemenran: wait and see, it is in the next chapter. :)

walks in drinking milk I've had a craving for it lately. *Snape prepared the hearth as usual, then drapes himself over his armchair*

Oook. I think that is his cue to begin.

Chapter 13, *hits play*

The Leaky Cauldron was in an uproar. The platform 9 3/4 was buzzing with too much excitement and vigor even for September 1. And every single wizard or witch that subscribed to the Daily Prophet had one subject of discussion: Harry Potter.

The article that had shaken the foundations of the wizarding community was as follows...

The Boy-Who-Lived is blind

by Special Reporter Rita Skeeter

It has been found that the Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter, last year's winning Champion of the Triwizard Cup held in Hogwarts grounds, can no longer see. The boy has been residing in Hogwarts for the better part of the summer months, and, according to rumours from sources within the school, he is under the care of Madam Poppy Pomfrey, the school medi-witch. It is the author's question why the boy was not sent to St. Mungo's to ensure the best possible care, when it is obvious that Harry Potter has been targeted a lot of times by supporters of You-Know-Who. It is the assumption of the author that it is precisely for this reason that Harry Potter will remain within Hogwarts grounds, therefore under protection of the school's powerful wards.

The reasons for Harry's blindness are mysterious. Our sources imply that it was the result of a dangerous attack or fight of some sort, but the real facts or events are still unclear. One thing comes to everyone's mind: Could Harry Potter's blindness be the result of an attack of Death Eaters, or You-Know-Who himself, since the ministry denies even the slightest possibility of the Dark Lord's restoration to

power, an opinion supported strongly by Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Order of Merlin, First Class, and Harry Potter himself? To this, the author has no answer.

Ron almost smiled as the Hogwarts Express pulled out of the station. He looked up at Hermione who was waiting for her friend's reaction, after reading the article.

"Well?"

"I'd say this article is far less odious than those of last year." Ron grinned and tossed the paper to the side. "How did you manage it?"

"I blackmailed her. I still am the only one who knows that she is an illegal animagus. I will keep the secret only if she writes what we don't mind her writing. Did you notice? She has started to give Harry credibility about You-Know-Who coming back to power, not portraying him as a lunatic!" Hermione jumped up in excitement to re-read the relevant sentences.

"That really is great 'Mione... but ... aren't you wondering just how Harry got blinded?"

The girl sighed.

"I would love to think it was Death Eaters or something to those lines... but then your father would have known, after all he is in the ministry. Something would have warned us."

"That's true... and Percy is still very close to Fudge. Prats that he is, he would tell us about Harry."

"AND the ministry would never allow the Headmaster to nurse Harry to health in the school. Rita's right on that one."

Ron was very quiet, and glanced around the compartment before asking the next question.

"Do you think the Dursleys did it? I mean, they keep him caged like an animal and all. We had to rescue him a couple of years back."

"Oh, Ron, that would be horrible! And Harry never told us that they were hitting him or something."

However, the girl's eyes were eloquent that she was not dismissing the possibility in the least.

"Well... Harry doesn't talk much about them. So we don't really know about that. And perhaps it was some sort of accident that the Dursleys made worse or something." Ron bristled at the idea that Harry might not have been provided with proper care. He flushed beet red.

"I wish I could perform magic out of school-- then I'd show the Dursleys! And I'd take Fred and George with me!"

Hermione shushed Ron.

"We don't really know if they are to blame, Ron. And for heaven's sake, keep your voice down. We don't want to fuel more gossip-- that can be harmful."

"Well well. If it isn't the little mudblood and the Weasel. Missing your Batty Potter? Gonna guide him from bumping into walls and point his wand for him?" Draco's voice drawled from the entrance to the compartment, and this time he had Crab and Goyle with him. Hermione clenched her teeth at the way she was called, but this time it was Ron that had the perfect jibe:

"I don't know Malfoy, seemed to me that he knew pretty well where to aim his wand, didn't he, mudface? Or is it mud ferret face? Or, no wait wait, bouncy mudface!" he said, still laughing from the previous event in Diagon Alley. Draco flushed purple from anger and went for his wand.

"Uh uh, Malfoy-- or the first thing you see..."

... is gonna be the infirmary when we get to school."

Twin wands from twin Weasleys flanked the three Slytherins. From inside the compartment, Hermione's and Ron's completed the

potential crossfire. Crabbe and Goyle looked at Draco in question, and he huffed and walked away, swearing revenge. Fred and George grinned and entered the compartment.

From that point on, the ride to school was peaceful-- although Harry's absence from the train was a dampening factor to the general enthusiasm... except for the Slytherins.

"You called for me, Professor."

"Yes, Potter. This is important, so try to focus as much as your brain can handle. I do not want anyone to know that your snake is your sight familiar. Is this clear? You will have your owl with you at all times that you will actually need eyesight, and make it look that you see through her."

"You will allow me to take Hedwig in the Potions Class?" Harry was incredulous. He heard Snape's put off clicking of his tongue, a sign of the oncoming consession he was about to make for his sake.

"Yes Potter. But you will charm her to stay perched on your shoulder at all times. Sasha will have to be concealed in your sleeve, and any parseltongue will have to be whispered. I assume your ... other two companions are aware of her existence, so make sure they make enough distraction so that nobody notices you speak. It is imperative that everyone believes the owl to be your eyes."

Harry knew why this was so important. Draco Malfoy would report to his father what he was using, and the information Snape had given Voldemort had to be confirmed in order to ensure the man's cover and life, even for a short period of time. He nodded.

"Yes, sir."

He felt a heavy pause. Sasha hissed to him that she was uneasy, and he petted her on the head discreetly, already starting to conform to the Potions Master's wishes.

"Our... sessions cannot be overt anymore either, as I am sure even you can fathom. Not our -substantial- ones. However, you will make sure that you practice what I teach you with Lupin, or at least have everyone believe that you are doing so."

"Don't worry, professor. I will."

"You obviously cannot play Quidditch at the start of the year. Professor McGonagall has put you as the reserve seeker." Snape threw that on Harry with some of the old indifference and lack of cushioning. The boy flinched, but the neutral expression shifted minimally and only for fractions of seconds.

"I... I understand, sir."

"I have arranged with Madam Hooch to coach you... among other arrangements." Snape said almost carelessly, but he was entirely aware of how he was throwing the boy the lifeline just before he drowned his dream into a sea of despair. He could see how his whole face lit up and his shoulders straightened up at this statement-- though to his credit he did not ask what those new arrangements could be. Snape caught himself smiling while studying the slight fluctuations on the boy's expression.

"That is all for now, Potter. Try not to look too capable-- I am sure you will manage, Gryffindors are naturals on that particular trait." he drawled, his cutting voice re-setting the balance in the atmosphere. Harry nodded and smiled as he tapped around, about turning to leave. Snape had the uncomfortable notion that Harry was starting, much like Lupin, not to take his jibes and cutting voice into too much consideration. He clenched his teeth in anger over that.

And the brat was blind-- so any glare towards him would be completely lost. Blasted Potter.

Harry fidgeted around in his room. He was worried. Was he going to share the same dorm with the rest? If so, it would be so much more difficult to conceal Sasha, to unwind. Harry could not always

understand it, but when he did, he hated being stared at for what he now was. He had hated it before as well, but now it grated on his nerves even more. Thankfully, blindness shielded him from most stares-- except Remus Lupin's, Albus Dumbledore's, and Severus Snape's. He somehow always could tell when either of the three professors were looking at him.

"Hi Harry. I knew I could find you here."

Harry smiled and turned around.

"Headmaster. I still can't manage to hear you enter." he said quietly, fingering the handle of the cane. Dumbledore chuckled.

"It would not do not to keep some excitement, now would it? Before I tell you why I have come, would you care for a lemon drop?"

Harry grinned. He would normally have declined, but he was really nervous. The time was up, and real show would start, and Snape's instructions had not helped relieve that anxiety.

"I'd love one, professor." he said and reached out to where he heard the shuffling of paper. Dumbledore made sure the boy's hand landed correctly and picked a candy. Harry popped it in his mouth, savouring it. He heard a rumble around them and a small hum under his feet as it usually felt when a staircase was moving. But since Dumbledore did not seem at all alarmed or affected by that, Harry kept quiet.

"I was wondering Harry," Dumbledore asked almost jovially, "if you like this room at all. We were not very considering when we gave it to you."

Harry's heart skipped beats.

"Oh, yes sir. I like it very much. It --- it offers me so many things."

"That is very fortunate then, because you are obliged to keep it." Dumbledore said with that covert bounce in his voice when he announced things he liked. Harry couldn't help grinning from ear to ear.

"Really, sir?"

"Of course! This is one of the Gryffindor Prefect rooms. As a prefect, you have to stay here. Earlier in the summer I just asked the room to move to a more convenient place for Professor Snape. I... do not think he would appreciate walking up to Gryffindor Tower every day." Harry could imagine the twinkle in the old wizard's eyes. Then it sank in, and his jaw dropped.

"You... you are making me a prefect? But... wouldn't that..."

"You will do fine, I am sure. As for keeping a... cover on your duelling capacities, that can be accomplished easily regardless your prefect duties."

"But sir, wouldn't my ease with.. with not seeing put professor Snape in danger?"

Dumbledore smiled at the response.

"Tom Riddle believes that Professor Snape coaches you in duelling only-- so knowing your way about Hogwarts and other daily routine skills will not jeopardize his credibility. After all, there are others here that teach you." he said kindly, and Harry felt warmth.

Dumbledore continued, popping a lemon drop in his mouth as well.

"Now, I am sure you have heard all the rumbling in the walls?"

Harry nodded.

"That was your room returning to its proper place. Now, when you come out of the door you will be at the top of a staircase leading to the Gryffindor common room. The boys dormitories are the doorway to your left, and the girls right next to that. Opposite to your staircase is the one leading to the girl prefect's room-- which will be, I believe, Miss Granger. I think I have covered all I wanted to tell you, Harry." Dumbledore approached the young gryffindor who was still stomaching both the joy of keeping his private room, the fact that he

would not go through the door to an aisle anymore, and that he would be a prefect-- a -blind- one. He snapped back to focus when he felt the headmaster's hand pin something to his robe. The prefect pin.

"In case you are wondering if you deserve it-- there is not one boy or girl in Gryffindor to show as much control and responsibility as you, Mr. Harry Potter. Whether you can see or not with your physical eyes is irrelevant."

And with that, the kindly wizard walked out of the room. Harry did not hear any footsteps until the Headmaster started going down the stairs.

Harry took a deep breath before exiting the Gryffindor tower, tapping around more carefully, just in case he tripped because of nervousness. He did not want to trip, not when first impressions were being made. He had pulled on his school robes, and listened to the mirror telling him if anything on his appearance needed fixing. He could hear the hubbub of students pouring in the main hall for the feast. He stopped before the main aisle, at the top of the staircase behind the armour he so loved hitting when he was frustrated. He lingered some more, a procrastinating feeling sweeping over him. What if he stayed in the common room and did not have to face everybody, including chiding, aggressive Slytherins or sniffing Hufflepuffs?

He heard footsteps coming up behind him-- distinct ones, that he recognised by their lightness and threshold level, hint of a sound.

"Cold feet, Potter?"

Harry rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"Something like that, sir." Harry admitted freely to the potions master, simply and naturally, when in earlier times he would have tensed for a verbal battle.

"Think of it this way: Glasses never did become you." the potions master sneered and swept ahead to go take his position in the Head

Table. Harry touched his face, now realising that he was not wearing his eternal glasses-- and hadn't been for the whole summer. He didn't even remember where they'd gone-- and he did not want to remember the last time he had been wearing them. He fingered his wand arm. He had not wanted glamourie cast on the scarred, burnt flesh there, constantly afraid that some prank might make the spell shatter and reveal the scar tissue. Harry did not want to be unprepared for such an occasion. Instead, he was wearing a light glove with the fingers cut off to allow his fingertips to come in direct contact with anything he touched. The glove was of very thin, soft leather and tawn in colour. He found he liked it. Sirius had said it was 'way cool'.

He sighed and tapped his way down the stairs and towards the Main Hall, the hubbub of the students engulfing him. He wished he still could have Sirius around as Snuffles, but he had gone away the day before. Dumbledore had sent him on a mission in the beginning of the summer-- Harry remembered that particular conversation. It was the same one in which he had asked Snape to return to his position as a spy. Sirius had interrupted whatever it was he was doing to come and see and help Harry-- but now that it was obvious that Harry was getting as much help he needed, and was not in any immediate danger, Sirius Black had gone to resume his original mission.

Harry understood. But still he already was missing him and his boisterous, extravagant reactions.

"Are you ready, Harry?" Sasha hissed to him, as the boy yet again lingered, now in front of the entrance to the Main Hall, and already hearing whispers the type 'he's holding a cane' and 'do you think he - really- can't see?' and 'how will he even BE a prefect when he can't see jack?' or 'where are his glasses?' and a reply of 'he would not NEED glasses now, would he, stupid?'.

Harry stroked the top of the coral snake's head, now concealed in the wide folds of his robe's sleeves.

"Yes, I am... and you must be quiet now, or I won't take you with me next time. They must not know about you yet." Harry replied to her, and putting on a calm, controlled face, entered the main Hall.

It was not that the hubbub stopped-- not at all. If anything, it became louder. It was all the loud 'alright there, Harry?' and 'poor Harry, can I lead you anywhere?' that he was hearing peripherally. He was tempted to gets his wand out, zap towards every do-gooder's way and say that if he could get his aim straight, he could very well lead his own self. Fortunately, the angry scowl that he was starting to get because people were moving out of his way, but mysteriously were becoming more of a tripping hazard, was stopped by a clear voice that called out happily:

"Oi, Harry! I missed you!" and Hermione Granger threw herself in his arms. He hugged her tightly, still not leaving the cane, and glad that it whacked against somebody.

"I missed you too, 'Mione. Specially since you weren't in Diagon Alley with the Weasleys."

"Didn't Ron tell you?"

"Oh yes. I read the article-- a great improvement in that cow's writing if I may say so."

"Man, wicked! You are a prefect!" that was Ron's voice, and Harry grinned.

"Yes! I found out today."

"No doubt so that Gryffindors can get away with even more things..." drawled Pansy Parkison. "Because it is stupid to have a blind prefect- - what are you gonna do, poke around with your cane till someone comes out?" she scoffed and some laughed. Harry raised an eyebrow and smiled poisonously towards the direction of Pansy. He felt a discreet hand turn him slightly more to the left-- and he was sure he was now staring dead on.

"I wouldn't know, Pansy-- but why don't you ask Malfoy? I am pretty sure he has had a sneak preview of my methods." he quipped, and turned to his friends.

"Let's go sit down, shall we?"

When they sat down, Fred and George, who sat nearby, started talking fast.

"The quidditch team is all sad and worried-- Wood in particular."

"He'll just have to make do with another seeker for a while." Harry said and shifted in his seat. Quidditch was still something he did not want to overtly talk about. He made himself remember Snape's comment about Hooch and 'other arrangements'.

"Yeah, we know. He'll holding trials. I'll try as Keeper. Who do you think can be Seeker?"

Harry thought about it.

"Colin Creevey."

Hermione snorted, Ron gaped.

"You can't be serious."

"Of course I am serious. He has an eye for spotting things that don't want to be found, and taking their picture. He will spot a snitch, too." Harry grinned and folded up the cane.

Then, everything quietened down as the Sorting Ceremony began, and then it was time for Dumbledore's speech.

"Another year begins, and I wish to welcome you all to Hogwarts, old and new students. I wish to remind you first of the trivial, usual things- - such as the Forbidden Forest truly being forbidden, and that it is not allowed to wander the castle aisles after hours. Now that that is out of the way, announcements due: This year, we have once more Professor Remus Lupin in the Defense Against the Dark Arts position--"

Dumbledore waited until the uproar from gryffindor table and the excessive clapping from the hufflepuff and ravenclaw one somewhat

receded. Remus nodded and smiled at the students, glad that they still liked him despite of his secret being known now. The Slytherin table did not clap, and most were looking coldly at him, but some seemed okay with the idea. That in itself was a feat. Dumbledore continued.

"The other piece of news I have for you, is, unfortunately, more serious. You must have all by now been informed of what has happened to our student, your classmate, Harry Potter. I would ask of you not to continually try to extract information as to how young Mr. Potter became blind-- I assure you that there was Darkness involved. Allow him his privacy on this matter." Dumbledore let his quizzical announcement sink in. Harry almost smirked, but kept a straight face. Who knew what every student was imagining had happened-- nothing sort than a face to face duel with 10 Death Eaters, he was certain. If only they knew... but they wouldn't know. Harry would never tell.

He had grown serious again, and Ron had to nudge him for him to realise that it was time to eat. And eat fast, as he would then have to lead the First Years to the Gryffindor tower.

If he felt nervous about that, Harry couldn't tell. When it was time, he and Hermione got up.

"How many are they, 'Mione?" he asked surrepticiously.

"15. Do you want me to go ahead and you bring the rear?"

"Na. They'll all end up walking backwards. I'll take the lead." Harry said wryly and unfolded the cane, and carefully started out and towards the staircase.

"Follow me, first-years, and look around closely so that you will start learning your way around." he said casually, to a group of shuffling feet and not even whispers. he wondered if they were slackjawed or just staring. Tapping along with his cane, he led the way, until he heard a set of footsteps stray far too much. He stopped. Some first year almost bumped into him.

"Mione, someone is straying."

"I've seen him, Harry. You, what's-your-name, Zaheed. Come back with the group." he heard her snap and he smiled. He could do this. He started walking again. He could now hear whispers of 'he caught him!' and 'seems he doesn't need to see!' and 'mental!'

When he stopped at the Pink Lady portrait and spoke the password for all to hear, he heard Sasha hiss to him, as the students filed past:

"I think you impresssed them, Harry."

And Harry felt he had to agree.

There you go. Was this boring? I tried not to make it boring. But I suck at ceremonies. And big gatherings. Oh well. We enter part two of this story.... where more stuff is bound to happen. I hope you liked. I am nervous about this chapter.

As for my reviewers:

Kamenran: The question has been bothering me for a while. Well. This is my answer. Hope you approve :)

Jordan: I hope after this chapter you stick to that opinion...

Angel Baby: I do believe there is some of all houses in everyone-- and I do think that Snape probably was asked the same thing as Harry: Slytherin or Gryffindor? because it takes great courage to go back to being a spy-- or being one in the first place, considering how Snape became one... and then again there's Ravenclaw... *stops at Snape's glare* As for the rest.. *Snape glares* *sheepish grin* you'll see.

Barbara: I think so too! It's just that he's usually emotionally constipated. *smirks*

kitty: THANKS about charming my treats! *sneers to Snape* And as for what Harry will tell them, he will follow Snape's advice-- tell them nothing and see what happens. :) Of course, you can't avoid Hermione and bloodhound... heh.

bluestarfish: I hope so too... yes. I did put him through the wringer this time. But I had to shake Harry into seeing what are the stakes and what Snape has to juggle with. As for their relationship, I am hoping for a silent friendship-- up to now, we have silent truce. :)

Katy999: what's comeuppence?? *puts up sign 'I'm Greek and can't be bothered to use dictionary'* And yes, Harry will be able to play more pranks-- ironic thing is, he probably will have other things to do instead. Or well... most of the times.

Melissa Lupin: *laughs* don't worry. No help needed thinking up something like this after Dumbledore's speech. Hee hee. Sly old wizard.

t.a.g.: Thanks! I hope this chapter is realistic and satisfactory... and not too boring... ok I'll go now.

momma-dar: it's hard to make him be good yet. But we'll see.

frizzball: well, imagine him with his invisibility cloak-- I am amazed nobody has yet wondered if Harry still has that.

Lirael: hmmm. You sure Draco doesn't wanna be a death muncher?

Myk: *nervous* well... here you go. Hope you like!

Kaat Shadow Lover: good thinking! that will keep him busy. *watches as he charms away part of the sweet as he goes to study the recipe* well. *yells at his back* YOU SLYTHERIN! *composes herself* Italian custard would be grand-- and I hope this chapter was no disappointment. It will pick up soon.

Enfleurage: oh, that was bad syntax on my part. He was certain about the tears-- he was unsure about what to tell Harry is what I meant. I doubt he actually consciously pondered on the reason. :)

Lee Lee Potter: yep, perhaps! *giggles*

candleot: *scrapes floor with foot* uh... sorry? You are welcome for not killing him. I can't-- his contract says that he can't die while still in the lead. *chuckles*

DaBear: he is already a wizard-- he is superpowered enough as of yet. And he's young, so great power might harm him (to quote Ben Parker hehe). I am glad you like.

Darkhorse8100: Hmmm. *glances at Hedwig that squawks in terror* *smirks* I can't say. Here is more. I hope it's what you've been waiting for.

Jedi Cosmos: Thanks!

white owl: here is one more!

enters, Snape bracing against the door while getting out his wand to charm it shut wow. The winds are at 100 klms per hour here. Blown away!

Alright, now I know that Oliver Wood has graduated. *chuckles* Kindly forgive me my error and replace Wood with Katie Bell, who somehow strikes me as the next quidditch captain (don't ask me why - it's one of those things. heh).

Anyhow... first installment of the second part of this. Hm. I've had a lot of people asking for Draco to be good, as many for him to be evil, and a few telling me to do what I like. Very well... Let's.... educate him during the year, shall we? *evil glint in eyes*

Chapter 14 *hits play*

September 2nd was a Friday. And in the class schedule Harry had received, Fridays started with Double Potions. Harry woke up very early, used by now to be woken by the twittering of the birds and the shuffling of the house-elves' feet that were preparing the morning fires and other things for the day. He got dressed shakily with cold fingers. Butterflies danged in his stomach for that day was going to be the first of a series of charades. He had no idea what this day was holding for him. He outstretched his left hand for Sasha to slither on.

"You are nervousss, young masster?" the coral snake asked as she wrapped herself around the thin wrist snugly.

"Yes... very." Harry replied, stroking the triagonal head. Sasha's tongue flicked against Harry's skin in a light caress. Harry took out his wand. "I will cast a partial invisibility spell on you, Sasha, so that along with my robe sleeve over you you will not be seen."

"Don't explain... I trussst you." Sasha flicked her tongue and tasted the air, savouring the shifting of magical waves as Harry casted. Then, Harry pulled on his school robes.

He opened the door of his room and unfolded his cane, pocketing his wand. As he became more and more confident with his remaining senses, Harry used his wand less and less for orientation. He did not

want people to know real things he depended on-- that would only reveal weaknesses beyond the obvious ones. Harry smirked as he walked towards the owlery to get Hedwig. Snape and his paranoia was starting to rub off on him.

He opened the hatch to the owlery and was greeted with the cozy air and low, soft noises of owls taking their rest there.

"Hedwig. Come here, girl." he said softly. Harry hadn't noticed, but he had started to speak in low, velvety tones lately that did not cover noise. Hedwig flew to Harry's outstretched arm and perched there. Harry smiled weakly. "Do you mind being my decoy, girl?" he asked the bird fondly, and Hedwig hooted lovingly, nudging Harry's earlobe to make her approval known. Harry stroked the soft, silky feathers, and turned to direct himself to breakfast.

"Alright there, Harry?"

Harry swore that the next person to ask him that would get hexed purple.

"Yes, Dennis, I am fine."

"Do you want me to lead you anywhere?" Dennis asked excitedly. Harry wondered if all this affair was a game to the younger student.

"No, Dennis, I can manage. But please step to the side, or my cane might hit you." Harry replied with more eagerness in the last part of his sentence than concern. Dennis hopped to the side and Harry walked warily past. He found that somehow, the limbs of classmates kept being in his way after the over-excited student had jumped to the side. He wondered if they were doing it on purpose or out of sheer clumsiness.

It was with these thoughts that he sat huffily to have his breakfast, which sprung up immediately as he touched his fork and knife.

"Oy Harry. You looked peeved." Ron's voice opposite him made him sigh.

"It is just that it was far easier when the castle was empty." he exclaimed and gave a piece of toast to Hedwig on his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Harry. It will be better later. They are clustering around you is all." Hermione said bossily while eating her eggs.

"Think if I hex them radially, they will keep their distance?" Harry said with feeling and shoved a mouthful of toast and jam in his mouth. There was a pause around him that made him wonder momentarily, then Ron said in his usual tact:

"Man, you spooked us out, you just sounded like Snape!"

"RON!"

Harry only chuckled.

"Speaking of Snape, we have Double Potions coming up."

"Is that why you have Hedwig with you?" Ron asked. Harry nodded.

"Is she your sight familiar? I thought it was--"

"Shhh! You thought right, Hermione, but that has to remain secret. We can't have the Slytherins know I have... another one. I have charmed her to be invisible for this reason." Harry whispered so low that Ron and Hermione had to lean within centimeters to be able to hear him.

"Okay... but why?" it was Hermione that asked again.

"Because Voldemort thinks I see through Hedwig. And he has to continue to do so. Lives are at stake over this information." Harry whispered. Hermione and Ron looked at each other with numbness and understanding. They both realised that Harry was refering specifically to a single life at stake: Severus Snape's.

"What do we have to do?" Hermione asked.

"Just make sure nobody hears me speak in parseltongue during Potions or Divination, Ron."

Ron nodded, and when he saw Harry's expression remain expectant of an answer, he said:

"You got it, Harry.... though I can't believe we will be actually helping--"

"RON!"

Hedwig squawked her dissatisfaction to being in a dungeon.

"Mr. Potter-- the fact that the Headmaster has obliged me to tolerate your ... 'requirements' as of late does not entitle me to have your owl disrupt my lesson. 5 points from Gryffindor." the silky voice cut as razors across the cool atmosphere in the potions classroom.

"Yes, professor." Harry stroked her chest gently. Ron bristled, and set to cutting his sandalwood root with more malice than before.

Harry's nimble fingers felt the edge of the root and with precision sliced paper thin slices rivaling the quality of the ones professionals prepared. He then felt around, his fingers snaking around a vial.

"Sasha...?"

"It is dark purple, Harry." the snake promptly provided.

Thus Harry proceeded with his potion, and Snape watched the blind boy with the peripheral of his vision. A warm smugness permeated him as he strode through the classroom, proud of himself to have thought of such an effective solution for the Potter boy. He smirked to himself and wondered if shaping Harry Potter from a cripple to better-than-before was enough to release him from a debt he never liked to ponder on: James Potter's wizard's debt. Ah well.

As he walked past the Slytherin side of the classroom, he frowned. He saw Draco Malfoy preparing a lump of mirkwood root while eyeing Potter's table. Damn brat. Snape always saw the pranks little Malfoy and his cronies did against the Gryffindors in his class. And little Malfoy knew it. His body tensed as the mirkwood root would cause the potion that was being brewed to explode. It would be a tactical error to prevent Draco from pulling the prank, as his favoritism was evidence to his fellow Deatheaters and Voldemort that Snape was loyal. But he did not, in the same time, want the corrosive liquid all over half the Gryffindor's fifth years.

Draco flicked his wand and the mirkwood shot with speed towards Harry's cauldron. Snape pulled out his wand.

And Harry's hand closed around the small ingredient seconds before it hit the boiling surface. Ron stared slackjawed, Hermione blinked, ladle still on hand, Neville dropped his roots, Draco's eyes widened in shock and breathing stopped throughout the classroom. Snape found that he needed a great deal of willpower not to grin like Lupin had other times in the duelling room. The boy was really surpassing his wildest expectations. However, he managed to keep a straight face as Harry quietly set the root aside and continued working.

Snape was tempted... -so- tempted, to take 20 points from Slytherin...

...but that would be out-of-character for 'Snape The Death Eater'. So Snape took a deep breath, glared at Malfoy, then at Harry knowing that would have no effect on the boy, and in the rest of the hour decided that he would not deduct any more house points-- even for Neville.

Well, maybe a few, for Neville. The boy was a god damn menace.

Thankfully, the rest of the class went on peacefully, and Snape pretended he did not notice Hermione helping Neville so that his potion would not explode. He truly did not want deducting any points, as he could not express his satisfaction to Harry's level of achievement otherwise. He knew the young gryffindor well enough to be assured that Harry would notice.

"Harry! We can't let that- that Slytherin get away with what he tried to do in Potions!" Ron spluttered as Harry walked, back straight, cane tapping, a little, faint smirk playing at his lips.

"Don't worry, we won't."

"Harry, don't do anything that will get your into trouble." Hermione warned.

Harry laughed wryly.

"Hermione... I am already soaked. I have no fear of rain."

"So, what are we gonna do to him?" Ron asked eagerly, his eyes twinkling with excitement, his mind racing to try and imagine what other capacity Harry was not currently displaying.

Harry patted Hedwig and released the charm keeping her perched on his shoulder. The white owl flew away relieved.

"Something... original." Harry smirked. Ron grinned, and Hermione sighed worriedly.

Snape walked into Dumbledore's office quickly.

"What is it now, Albus?"

The Headmaster seemed amused and irritated in the same time.

"Cornelius Fudge is livid. About not being informed on Harry's situation."

Snape sneered.

"He is threatening to accuse us of acting against the interests of the wizarding world."

Snape scowled.

"However, since after the article about Harry and... ruminations and rumours around the circumstances of Harry's blindness, he is not willing to be called irresponsible as Minister."

Snape rolled his eyes.

"He is willing to consider that Voldemort has risen again."

At that, Snape decided to sit in the armchair with a flourish to listen further.

"He will heed the Order of the Phoenix, then?"

Dumbledore poured tea for two. "When he finds out about it."

Snape arched an eyebrow. "You haven't told him the Order is almost come together?"

"No. And I do not intend to."

"And why not? The man is malleable, and now he will accept whatever you tell him. He has no spine."

"But he has the power to prosecute you, being the closest specimen he can get his hands on to display his grip on the... upcoming crisis."

Snape scowled again and filled the rest of the older wizard's thought. "And if he attends an Order meeting, he will know that I am a member of it, and so he will disband it, and in the same time my cover with Voldemort will be blown."

Dumbledore only nodded and sipped from his cup. Snape clenched his teeth, various death-eaterish thoughts coarsing through his brain about Minister Fudge.

"Severus."

Snape's eyes focused again on the Headmaster.

"Yes?"

"I never found the moment to tell you how great a job I think you have been doing with Harry." Dumbledore smiled warmly, and Snape felt the same soothing, encompassing feeling that had reached him when he had taken on the challenge of a blind teen. This time though, he felt another, dark and cold inkling of an emotion seep into him, biting at him mercilessly.

"I do not deserve your praise, Headmaster." he said quietly, looking down in much the same way he had as a student, and prodigal ally...

"Why do you think that, Severus?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"When you sent me to go bring Potter back in the utmost urgency..."

"Yes?"

"... I did not do it in the utmost urgency."

Silence ensued and Snape did not dare look up. He knew he would break down to see disappointment and contempt in Albus-- the Headmaster of Hogwarts and his approval was all that Snape really lived for. He just continued.

"I... thought that you were exaggerating-- and you have to admit, Sybil never is reliable... and I was angry that well I went about half a day later." he swallowed.

The silence lingered somewhat, but was broken by the chink of china.

"You went there exactly 3 hours and 20 minutes after I have urged you to." Dumbledore's voice was almost neutral. Snape looked up in amazement. The elderly wizard nodded.

"Oh, I know. I've know about that, Severus."

"And... you still...?... you never told...?"

Dumbledore smiled sadly, his eyes still accepting and warm. Yet Snape winced inwardly at the sadness he could perceive. Sadness that he had put there, just as previously it had been pride.

"Yes, I still let you take up the responsibility of training Harry, and I never confronted you with... your lack of trust in my instincts, because I know that the hardest judge on you is your own self. You, my friend, have the capacity to devise the hardest, more tedious of punishments for you-- and in the same time make them so they offer, atone, return to the full, if possible, what you have deprived the wronged party. You had no need of me telling you anything-- or deprecating you.

Snape breathed in shakily.

"It haunts me that the boy could still be seeing if I had gotten a move on."

Dumbledore was thoughtful.

"The possibility does exist." he said, not cushioning the potion master's fear. "but you would have to ask Harry himself about that."

The horror that was momentarily etched on Snape's face was as rare as snow in the summer.

He almost shook his head, unable to say that he could not bring himself to telling Harry that.

But the headmaster's glance was relentless-- and Snape never could say no.

Draco was still perplexed about Harry. No matter how many times he did the math, it just did not fit. Harry was blind. Blind people were usually beggars and other weak specimens of humanity, thanking you for kicking them and thus paying some attention to them.

They were -not- capable individuals able to withstand you in any way.

So why did Harry Potter manage not only to understand that he was about to pull a prank on him, but also prevent it in that spectacular

way? Causing him to look like he was not control of the situation in front of his little court, and earning a glare from Snape for not accomplishing his joke on Potter like he usually did.

He was so immersed in his thoughts he did not notice anything-- and he certainly heard nothing. It was child's play for Hermione and Ron to take out Crabbe and Goyle. Harry had requested that they leave Draco to him. They gently muttered 'Rictusempra'. Draco looked up only when the two lubering teens went down.

Harry grinned sinisterly at the blonde boy-- or towards him. He was standing alone in the quiet corridor near the dungeons, where Draco had been walking, his white cane near his body, his wand pointed to him-- to him. The green unfocused eyes glistened with logistic cool-- Harry was calculating -- and that made them terrible to see.

Harry's voice lashed out like a whip.

"Disocculo!"

And suddenly, Draco's world faded to black. He could see nothing. No matter how much he blinked, the blackness would not end.

Draco had never before been this scared in his life. He started flailing his hands about, whimpering, and when that did not salvage him, he screamed.

"Silencio." Ron's all-too-glad voice.

Suddenly Harry's voice was all too near, and Draco's flailing arms were slapped away with some hard stick-- Draco figured the cane would be it. It hurt.

"Do you think it's fun picking on the blind, Malfoy?" Harry's voice was steely and sneered, vaguely reminiscent of another. He tried to backstep, only to trip and fall over some obstacle. A hard wooden point was stuffed under his chin.

"I think I will agree with you. It is rather fun to pick on them, isn't it? It is rather fun to downput others and Eat Death, isn't it?" Harry's voice was unwavering and almost harsh.

"Only perhaps not as nice when the Death you Eat is your own, right, -pureblood-?" Hermione's voice.

Draco was crying, sniffing his apologies and asking to be pardoned. Even with silencio active. He heard a snort.

"In the end he's just not worth it." the redhead spat and got up, turning away. Hermione sighed and smiled at the youngest male Weasley, and followed. Harry was left pressing the tip of his wand under the soft of Draco's jaw.

"The charm will wear off with the gag, Malfoy. Just enough time for you to think a while-- if you can." the Boy-Who-Lived whispered in Draco's ear, and then was gone without so much as a hint of a footstep.

And that's that. I am WAY too nervous about this...

bluebird161221: Ah, now I will know who to come after if that fate befalls me. *L*

Myk: Because you are expecting me to do well, and as a self-conscious person that I am, that creates anxiety. *L* it's shrink stuff.

Melissa Lupin: What do you think? was that a worthy prank?

Lady Lunar Phoenix: Because it is not an injury he got from the shards-- that was healed by Poppy. He got it from the hits in the head, and that's not as direct as what Fawkes can heal. It's his optical nerve that's hurt. That can't heal.

Kaat Shadow Lover: *as she's enjoying the bribe* Mental is somewhat a compliment. When ron says it, it is definately a compliment. *bows at compliments* you are making me blush! I am glad you liked the trick with Hedwig. As for his hand, the scars are healed in the sense that they are not dangerous or infectiable or

anything anymore. But it's not a pretty sight. Harry wants to cover the injury more than he needs to-- of course, his arm is somewhat frailer after all this. But nothing really impeding. As for what I will do with it, wait and see :)

Jaimynsfire: nah, I admit it when I'm wrong-- I just forgot Wood's status.

Kaeli-Chan the Great: hmmm. *sphinx silence*

Zardiphillian Beryllix: Duly noted *g*

shitsumon: there you go. You now know what happened next.
chuckles

Kamenran: true, so very true.

Lee Lee Potter: Thanks!!

Katy999: *notes it for future reference* I think the snitch does make a sound-- it does in the movie. I'll see.

phreakreader: thank you so very much. Cho Chang... should still be getting over Cedric.

bluestarfish: I hope Sev is satisfactory in this chapter as well :)

Mikee: patience, patience... I'll try not to hurt anyone... too much. ;)

Angel Baby: I think Dumbledore is JK's Supreme Wizard. I'm keeping him that way, even for blind wizards with lightning shaped scars :)

Laterose: Harry -is- weary and tired. But he gets stronger by the day. :)

Jordan: I should hope he will. :)

Pose: Thanks! It's what I am hoping to achieve AND maintain.

nightingale: *lavishes in the X-Large review* I live for these! As for Harry's reaction to the Dursley abuse, it is yet too early. Yes, it will definately come back to him. And you asked the crucial questions just as I was about to answer them. As for whether Harry's eyesight could be saved, you can guess. *g* if you see the clues in the first chapter.

walks in with Snape carrying the usual tools of the trade: quill, parchment, innumerable amounts of coffee Hello everyone. *sits down and tends her cup to Snape who clicks his tongue and serves, looking away* *curls up and settles* Well, let's see what happens next, shall we?

By the way, in your wonderful reviews I saw a GREAT abundance of remarkable, VERY alluring plot bunnies. They MUST be utilised, it's a shame if they aren't!

Therefore the need arises for ... *drumroll* a Challenge!

The Challenge requirements are:

1. It must include Severus Snape and Harry Potter.
2. It must NOT be slash, sorry!
3. One of the two or both have to be somehow physically impaired in a significant way at the start of the story (or at least not at the end of it)
4. Not more than one non-canon character should be central to the story (except for our two lead people, of course).

If you take up the challenge and write a story, PLEASE tell me about it! I want to read it, and I am sure others will too, so I will be posting you in my Stories section at my profile, and mention your fic in the next chapter I put up!

rubs hands with glee I can't wait!

Now, on with the story. Chapter 15, *hits play*

"I tell you, Professor, that Potter hurt me!" Draco was having trouble controlling his rage enough to appear traumatised. Snape side looked momentarily at him between scratching harsh remarks on potions essays.

"You look fine to me, Malfoy."

"But sir!" Draco was aghast. Would Harry get away with almost blinding him, with daring to stand up to him more actively than before?

Snape sneered.

"I would like nothing more than to expel Potter for you, Malfoy. But I think we shall be having a bit of trouble convincing the Headmaster or Professor McGonagall that a -blind- student assaulted you so gravely, and managed not to leave a trace of his assault behind."

Draco felt his ears hot as he looked down, clenching his teeth in rage and shame. The very idea that a blind Harry Potter bested him and his two henchmen and so effectively that there was nothing he could do about it. He did not dare meet the gaze of his Professor, an accomplished Death Eater... and he dreaded to see how his father would react to hear such news.

The prospect was as odious as letting Potter off the hook. Perhaps even more so.

"I suggest you return to your common room, Mr. Malfoy. And next time you come to complain to me about anyone-- especially Mr. Potter -- be sure to have evidence." Snape's voice was like a cut with glass-- deep and surgically accurate. Draco's hatred for the glorified gryffindor, that now on top of everything else was starting to wear the martyr's mantle, skyrocketed. He stormed out of the Potion Master's office, and past Crabbe and Goyle that were waiting for him outside. When Goyle tried to talk to him, Draco hexed his lips shut and didn't let the curse up until the Slytherin Head Girl came to see what the muffled squeals were all about.

Draco swore revenge. He spent the whole weekend thinking about it.

Monday mornings were reserved for 5th year Divination class.

"My dears, welcome to this year's Divination. I feel that this year will offer you great insights into the mists of the future..." Sybil Trelawney said mistily to the class of 5th years sitting in the puffs. Ron snorted,

and Harry half smiled in a rather sarcastic smile. Trelawney's eyes squinted behind the monstrous lenses at the two Gryffindors.

"My dears, your year will be so very hard, I can see." she said bitingly. Both boys had the expression of 'you are great at stating the obvious'. Actually, the only obviously content parties in Professor Trelawney's class were Parvati Patil, Lavender Brown and Hedwig, that enjoyed the warm and close to stifling atmosphere enough to settle on Harry's shoulder and puff out her feathers for a nap.

"This year we shall learn how to coax the secrets of the future out by the throwing stones. Of course I have to warn you that only those with talent shall be able to truly appreciate the Divining Stones..." she said as she set two pouches on each table.

Harry opened the pouch, and in his hand cool pebbles rolled out. They felt smooth and warm. Sasha's eyes focused on them, and Harry saw that they were of grey or obsidian in colour, with a single white one in every set. There were 3 grey, 3 obsidian and one white. They looked like stones from a seashore. Ron beside him smirked again.

"Oh wow, I can see my death already," the redhead whispered under his breath, knowing that Harry would hear-- and indeed Harry chuckled.

"Padma's glaring at you." Ron said conspiratorily and Harry smiled some more. Professor Trelawney clicked her tongue and said in an irate voice:

"Restlessness will cloud your Vision, and the Divining Stones won't serve you. Please, my dears, we need utmost silence."

When perfect quiet was restored again, she started to say in a mysterious, aloof voice:

"Open your books on page 328... but my dears, if you can't already feel the pull of the stones, I am afraid it will not be of much use to you... Now take the stones in your left hand, the white one in the

center. When you feel ready to see your future, shake the stones in your hands seven times and throw them in front of you on the table."

Harry heard several stone claquing on the tables, and he released his own as well, although he did not feel any kind of pull except that of Hedwig's claws on his shoulder. Then with Sasha's help he saw the pattern in which they had scattered and tried to compare it with pictures in his Divination book, so that he could get a prediction. Not that he expected to, really.

In fact, Harry was ready to claim that he had yet once more seen his impending and dreadful doom, when actually the pattern of the grey, and obsidian stones did appear in the illustration of the Divination textbook:

Friendly Peril: When one of the three grey stones is away from the other two and close to the white. To further analyse this pattern, refer to page 330.

Harry quickly flipped to that page.

Unexpected Ally: when two black stones cluster with the remaining two grey, away from the white.

Harry looked at his stones again through Sasha. True enough, the white and one grey stone were touching, whereas two black and the rest of the grey were together. He saw that the remaining black stone was furthest away from the rest of the stones, almost mingling with Ron's. He turned to look for the list of interpretations for straying stones.

Standoff: when any one of the three black stones is completely away from any clustering of the remaining stones.

"Have you made a prediction, my dear? I feel that your inner Eye is active." he heard Trelawney's approaching voice. Harry swallowed, unsure of what to think.

"I am to have an unexpected ally, a standoff and ...friendly peril." he said, saving what he estimated would excite the Divination professor

for last. Trelawney almost cooed with sympathy that woke Hedwig and made her squawk, and made Harry want to go down the trapdoor that very minute.

"Oh my dear, my dear. That is grave indeed! You must set your affairs straight soon, my dear, with such a sombre divining from the Stones!" she said, her many bracelets jingling in what Harry had no doubt was a flourish of movement. Ron scoffed beside him.

"Come ON, that could mean anything! It's not always BAD."

To that, Trelawney shook her head sadly and sagely, like a wise one to an imbecile. Although Harry felt like smirking himself, he felt somewhat preoccupied and decided to keep his first truthful divination in mind, just in case.

Draco was waiting for Harry right outside the DADA classroom. And sure enough, the blind boy walked up, tapping lightly around, his two friends on his right-- Harry seemed to avoid being in the middle of the trio lately.

"Malfoy is waiting at the door" Ron said, already bristling for a fight.

"Calm down Ron. It's going to be okay, he won't try anything with Professor Lupin at hearing shot. Why don't you and 'Mione go find a seat?" he urged in a way that made Hermione pull Ron in the class before the redhead could object. Harry took his time approaching, winding Draco up with his tardiness.

"I won't let this pass, Potter." the blonde boy snarled low. Harry armed himself with a sardonic smile.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about, Malfoy. I am after all, struggling to get along." he said mockingly making Draco seeth even more. How was it possible that the gryffindor was toying with him so? How on -earth- could he have become more of an opponent now than before?

Draco watched as Harry walked confidently past. He frowned, watching the gryffindor call to his friends and deftly direct himself to where he heard them be. It definately did not add up. Nobody could be like this on his own. Potter had some secret that was helping him be the shining hero-slash-martyr.

Draco decided he would find out. And then, he would use it against him-- and let him flail in the darkness like he had until the Disocculo curse wore off. He would extract revenge in multiples. He would make Potter pay. Along with anyone covering for the sorry brat.

"Mr. Malfoy, if you wouldn't mind joining us?" Professor Lupin's voice made him pay attention to the here and now. Draco walked hautilly in the class and took a seat. One more year with a werewolf in tatters as an excuse for a DADA professor. Pathetic.

Remus looked at his class, diligently setting up for a lesson. His eyes fell on the trio. Harry was frowning, listening to whatever it was that Ron was whispering to him, and Hermione was rolling her eyes. He smiled inwardly-- it looked almost normal. If only it could have been. He sighed and started his lecture.

"Today we will talk of Golems-- they should be at page 90 of your books. Does anyone know what they are?"

Hermione's had shot up, as usual.

"Yes, Miss Granger."

"A Golem is a man made of clay. It can be a protector or an assassin. It does not know pain or fear and cannot think for itself. It was first created by Rubey Lew in 1390."

"Very well, Miss Granger. 5 points to Gryffindor. One can animate the Golem by writing on its forehead the word Ameth. What does that mean?"

Draco's hand shot up this time.

"Mr. Malfoy."

"It means Truth, sir. And Meth means Death." he sneered towards Hermione's way.

"Very good Mr. Malfoy. 5 points to Slytherin. To kill a golem you must erase the letter A from the word Ameth on its forehead so that 'Meth' remains which, as Mr. Malfoy informed us, means Death."

"What does the scar on Potter's forehead mean?" Draco quipped and the Slytherins roared in laughter.

Ron scowled as did Hermione, but Harry found it somehow funny and suppressed a chuckle. It surprised the young Gryffindor that a jibe from his constant opponent would amuse him, but there it was. In fact, after Snape and his snippy lines were seeming moderate in the effect they produced in him, schoolmate comebacks made him laugh.

Still, Professor Lupin took those 5 points from Slytherin back.

"I have called you, my most loyal of Death Eaters... for a very special reason."

The dark cloaked, white-masked people shifted uneasily. Most 'special reasons' that Voldemort had involved high levels of pain. Usually theirs included.

"A plan has been thought of how to bring Hogwarts down from the inside." Voldemort savoured each word.

"How, my lord?" and eager voice from the dark gathering.

"Ah, Lucius, my loyal friend. I taste the eagerness in your voice. But I do not like interruptions."

Lucius retracted, but no curse came. Apparently Voldemort was too glad with his plan to feel like punishing anyone just yet.

Voldemort petted Nagini, and started talking again.

"The gates of Hogwarts shall open on the full moon of my choosing... and there will be no way wards will keep us out. I shall see to that. You, in the meantime, see to it that the Dementors are on our side by that time-- and that your brothers and sisters in Azkaban are freed within October."

The Death Eaters all bowed, to show their obedience. Voldemort then said:

"Severus."

"My Lord."

"I need your Potions skills. I need a powerful multiplication potion."

"My Lord, what sort of multiplication would it need to perform?" Snape asked, as if that was relevant to the potion. It was not-- but it was highly relevant in order to get a clue as to what the Dark Lord was cooking up.

"Of large things-- the size of human bodies." was all the Dark Lord would reveal.

And Snape did not feel it safe to ask any further.

Draco had found the way to get back at Harry Potter. Mulling it over in his mind over the past weekend, he realised one of Harry's weaknesses-- his owl. He used Hedwig to see in classes-- or at least that was part of the story. Draco was determined to know just how much a part of the story it was.

And so he headed towards the owlery.

As he opened the door, seeing the snowy owl, he grinned, the dusk's sunlight glinting off his eyes and teeth almost ferally.

Revenge was truly sweet.

This is somewhat shorter than usual *hides behind a defiant Snape* don't hit me! There was no other place to stop the chapter without ruining the next!

Myk: *chuckles* it's ok. It's safe for me to be nervous-- I am a decreed overachiever. I would like to remain so. It -was- rather impressive... hee hee. Rubber ball practice pays off.

Kamenran: it would be fun, but then they will wonder who taught him to hex people so well....

kateydidn't: *evil smile* No comment on that.

t.a.g.: Snape must first build up the nerve to tell Harry... which will be soon. As for Draco, it is up to him to reform. I only write what he does. *chuckles* And I LOVE the long review!!

athenakitty: *relays your question to Draco* ummm *Draco looks back blantly* he won't answer me. *chuckles*

sk8reagle: *relays your question to Draco* *he snorts* he says not yet. *giggle*

DraconicalPriest: The idea has... a -lot- of merit.

Angel Baby: As Snape has demonstrated, it's never late for anyone. *grins widely* But first he has to sort out issues. *chuckles* *blushes for kind comments*

enahma: I have stated before that I simply don't do slash. :)

bluestarfish: *blushes* awww shucks. Thanks. And yes, he does seem more dangerous than before... *L* which was my intent. I hope this chapter was ok too.

Katy999: Yes it does have to wear off, cos Harry wouldn't wish his problems on anyone-- he's inherently good, remember? *chuckles*

Blackrose1356: takes more than one hint for one so deep into stuff, don't you think? *chuckles*

Mikee: Harry did that on his own. Snape was not going to prevent the root from falling in, he would just charm the cauldron frozen. He did not have the time tho. Credit goes all to Harry and his rubber ball training. *grin*

phreakreader: of COURSE there will be Lupin coming up. *chuckles* There is some Ron/Hermione there, true. Opposites attract. *chuckles* Ginny is always quiet... but I'll come to that when it's more appropriate to dwell on. As for Harry, I think he has enough on his plate. Perhaps a certain Cho, if he manages to finetune everything else.

Melissa Lupin: *L* I might, just for you.

Lee Lee Potter: Snape/Harry time is rarer as it is more dangerous with kids around. And I was very nervous about that, and even more nervous bout this!

Kaat Shadow Lover: *never had whiskey cake before* interesting! Snape gets into all sorts of dilemmas, doesn't he? *L* And yes, that would definately happen with Hedwig in the class.

Illustrius Sorrow: I truly have no idea-- entirely up to Draco himself. As for Snape being caught.. *Snape glare* he won't say.

Amber: Kinda difficult... but you never know.

Nightspear: Harry won't be giving with that piece of information... but you know how it is in Hogwarts...

PandaBear007: thanks!

deathsatmydoor: how can I resist that? *laughs*

Lirael: he didn't cry per se... he sniffled like in the Forbidden Forest.

Sabrina: you caught me! he didn't need to. I'd say he'd want to double check, in in truth, I just wanted to give Sasha some dialogue. *sheepish*

Shadowfax: perhaps, perhaps, perhaps! *sings along*

walks in with Snape looking around cautiously, in case livid reviewers lynch her He's prepared to use the wand he's carrying!

nods to Snape who scowls and flicks his wand to make streamers and confetti thank you for helping me reach 500 reviews!!! I love you all!

I shall try to give you more Severus/Harry today. I'll make every effort possible but remember-- characters write their own selves.

Chapter 16 *hits play*

Draco pointed his wand to Hedwig, and put her in a body bind that sent the other owls flapping away as Hedwig fell to the floor without so much as a squawk, her yellow eyes wide with terror. He grinned to himself, thinking of Potter and his despair when he found out that his precious familiar was little more than a chicken ready for the soup. He wouldn't be so high and mighty then. All it would take, would be to kill the little white bundle in front of him. He approached, kneeled before the bird where it had fallen on the floor and pointed his wand to the feathery breast.

"Avada..."

Draco had never been exceptionally lucky when he wanted to go through with a plan. This time, nobody was around but himself to impede him. And that was all that was needed. His eyes locked with the yellow, terrified ones of the Snowy Owl.

"Avada..." Draco's wand wavered. He scowled, trying to take his eyes away from the terror that he saw. He never expected to see such emotion in an animal-- he barely thought animals capable of wielding any, except Hufflepuff-style loyalty.

But these eyes... held him. He knew the fear he was reading, only too well. He had, after all, experienced it so many times under his father's stern punishments. It made his joints go loose, and his mind black of the Unforgivable he wanted to cast.

Draco did not know how much time passed while he and the bound bird were in this lock of stares. Then he scowled with self-deprecation and picked up the owl roughly.

Perhaps he would have to tweak his revenge just a bit.

Harry ran in Professor McGonagall's office, breathless, eyes wide.

"I can't find Hedwig!"

Minerva looked up from her work.

"Surely she's in the owlery?"

"She is not. I even looked through Sasha, but she was not in there, and I can't find her anywhere on the grounds. Neither Ron nor Hermione or even Colin can!" he said urgently, fear biting into his voice. Minerva stood up.

"Don't worry, Harry. She will be found. I am sure she is all right."

Further search revealed no owl, and Harry felt cold fear encasing his heart. What could have happened? He knew-- had known, that a decoy meant that sometimes, it gets hit as if being the real target but- - he had never truly thought that Hedwig would be in any danger while on Hogwarts grounds.

Yet she was missing.

Harry lost track of time staying seated in his Head of House's office when he heard the door open and familiar footsteps came in. He straightened up.

"Professor Snape?"

"I spoke with Professor Lupin, Potter." the voice was neutral.

Harry got up, fingering his cane nervously.

"Where? Is she dead?"

Snape watched the young Gryffindor's face. Harry was pale, eyes wide, slightly upwards, blinking many times -- Snape realised that up to then Harry rarely blinked anymore -- his hands wringing the cane he was holding. He scowled. How could he possibly have a talk as painful as the one Albus wanted? No. He could not possibly face those unseeing, accusing eyes-- the green stillness of them reminding him of Harry's mother on top of it all. He sighed.

"I do not yet know. But I have with me the way to find her, if she is alive.."

"What, how? Do it quickly!" Harry cried. Snape sneered.

"I do not recall being at your beck and call, Potter." he said, and Harry gritted his teeth.

"There is no time to lose, Professor... please!" he said forcefully. Sometimes, the urge to curse Snape senseless was overwhelming.

Harry heard the shuffling of parchment. He frowned as a roll of paper was shoved into his hands.

"Professor?"

"It's that infernal map, Potter. Activate it to look for your owl." Snape said irritably. Now Harry understood why Snape had been stalling. He almost smiled as he established the mind link with Sasha. The snake tasted the air and looked at the blank paper so that her young master could see. Harry pointed his wand, preparing to say the password, and lingered. Snape snorted.

"What, Potter, you object to me knowing the password to that piece of disciplinary menace?" he said sarcastically. Harry sighed and looked through Sasha's eyes as he muttered.

"I solemnly swear that I'm up to no good."

The dots started to appear.

Draco sat in the Herbology greenhouse, with Hedwig opposite him. The most bizzare thoughts were crossing his mind as he swayed his wand towards the bird idly. The owl's eyes never ceaced to be on him, rendering him useless.

If he was unable to kill an animal staring at him, how could he hope to be able to do it when a human, mudblood or muggle, was in Hedwig's position?

Draco shuddered. If he was not cut out to be a Death Eater, what was his future going to be like with a father that wanted him to carry on the tradition, and a Dark Lord that did not tolerate weakness?

He bit his lip hard enough to draw blood, feeling loathing both for himself, for failing his father, and his father and the whole Death Eater idea. It was the first time Draco truly felt trapped, effectively bound to fate he did not relish in and could not follow.

Immediately after this harsh realisation, Draco started to think about damage control-- it was all about damage control. He had to pretend, to convince he was the most bloodthirsty and callus of the Malfoy line.

Hard, when he could not actually kill the bird. But he'd give it a shot. A good shot.

Harry hurried towards the greenhouses, livid. Merlin knew what Malfoy was doing to his Hedwig. How could he have let her stay in the owlery after publicly showing her to be important to his activities? He had not bothered to call Ron or Hermione, and he was not sure he wanted to. Harry was not certain how he would react if he was met with a situation where Hedwig was being tortured by the blonde Slytherin. For the first time since his blindness, Harry was thankful that he was not able to see-- he did not feel he could afford to gaze upon a scene of blood and feather and leering wannabe Deatheaters.

The cane claqued against the iron door of the green house. Harry pushed it open and rushed inside.

"Give me back Hedwig, Malfoy!" the boy bellowed.

"Aw, what is it, blind boy, you need this bundle of feathers?"

Harry run towards where he heard the drawling voice. He heard footsteps padding to the right. He stopped, and tended his wand towards there.

"Give her back or I swear I'll make you pay." he spat.

"But she was so fun to play with!" Draco mock whined and laughed as harshly as he could possibly manage. "She likes hide-and-seek. I'll leave you to find her." the Slytherin said and left as Harry threw a couple of hexes at him, and used Ento to make sure they would home in. He felt suddenly as if a whole lungful of air and the matching energy left him as the curses (rictusempra and bodybind) left him. He was certain that had there been three, he would have felt dizzy. He decided to keep that in mind as Professor Snape's warning about using the homing charm consecutively came to his consciousness like a fading echo.

Harry did not concern himself further, his lashes wet and his heart beating painfully in his chest. He muttered, his voice breaking.

"Accio Hedwig."

The feathery bundle flew in his waiting hands. Harry's heart felt like dipped in hot water-- the bundle was moist and trembling. He lifted the body bind and asked Sasha, not feeling up to seeing himself.

"Is she hurt, Sasha?"

"There issss a lot of red... her eyesss are closed." the snake provided meekly.

Harry whimpered and pressed the warm, soft body against his chest as he used the cane again to ran back up to the infirmary.

He almost bumped into Remus Lupin.

"Harry, Harry! Take a breath." he said sharply, trying to break through to the distraught boy. Harry started shuddering as he held Hedwig close in one hand.

"He hurt her, I'll kill him, I'll kill him!" he ranted, not caring who heard him. There were some gasps in the peripheral of his hearing, registering that students and classmates were watching this. Professor Lupin's voice covered the jumble of sounds and calmed him.

"Calm down, Harry. Let me see her. Will you let me see her?"

The effect was disarming, serenity invaded Harry's senses as he relaxed his grip and felt Hedwig being taken from his arm. He swallowed and fidgeted. There was a pause while Remus was examining Hedwig that allowed the buzz of whispers and murmurs to come to Harry's attention again. He could not discern what they were saying, though-- he was not interested.

"She is only stunned." Remus' voice was relieved and almost jovial. Harry's head shot up and his shoulders straightened.

"Are... are you sure?" he said timidly as he heard the DADA professor mutter 'Finite Incantatem'. A loud squawk and a strong flutter of wings gave Harry more joy than he thought possible that day. Grinning he extended his hands towards the owl and took Hedwig, who initially tried to peck him, still scared from her encounter with Draco.

"It's me, Hedwig! It's only me." he said, not caring, his voice trembling in joy that she was not hurt. He managed to hug her once before the disgruntled bird flew away and out of the window.

"She wasn't bloodied? Sasha told me..." Harry trailed off and hoped that was not heard, or taken into account. He kicked himself. All the effort for concealing Sasha could now be lost because he was stupid enough to say her name out loud in the middle of the aisle.

"Oh, she was taken in, you know how girls can be impressionable. There was a paint hex on Hedwig that would soak her wings, but I

removed that too." Remus smiled, saving the situation, cushioning Harry's slip up.

Harry felt he could hug him there and then.

Draco sat in the Slytherin common room, his teeth clenched and anger seething. He had been assigned detention for a week with Filch by that bat McGonagall, and Snape sneered at him sarcastically as he passed him by in the aisle. He obviously already had fathomed his weakness. He only hoped that his House Head would wait for some evidence before relaying to Lucius the news that his son was an incompetent twit unfit to be Death Eater.

Of course to Crabbe, Goyle and Pansy he was the week's hero for making Potter whimper and tear up in the middle of the aisle. Usually Draco didn't care about them guffawing or Pansy cooing, but tonight they were simply unbearable for some reason.

"That was so cool, to get Potter's owl, Draco..." Pansy cooed for the upteenth time.

Draco felt like throwing up.

"Will you just take a hike already, Parkinson?" he snarled.

The girl scowled and pulled back towards the other side of the couch. She glared at Draco's profile for a few seconds then she asked:

"It's that Sasha quack, isn't it?"

Draco furrowed his eyebrows in incredulity.

"What?"

"The girl that tattled on you and gave Potter his owl, that Sasha What's-her-name.

"You're talking nonsense as usual again, Parkinson, there was nobody in there but---" Draco's eyes widened in realisation.

He had been barking up the proverbial wrong tree for answers to Potter's behavior.

It was late at night when Harry started tossing and turning in his bed in his room. It was even later that vision rushed into his mind unwanted and in the same time welcomed like poisoned water on a parched-up land...

... Voldemort looked upon the ragged forms kneeling before him in exultation. He smiled ferally, as he addressed them with the affection of a father to his worthy children.

"My most loyal of loyals. You are finally free. You of all others stayed loyal to me and never wavered... and you shall have the best rewards for this."

The thanks and words of worship were slurred but the gist was apparent. Then two more Death Eaters walked forward and knelt. These two seemed much more healthy than the others.

"My lord. We have searched all of Azkaban. There are no more of us remaining. The Dementors have scattered towards places of dark."

"I hope you remember my explicit stress on urgency, Avery. Let me remind you that the Dementors have to be recruited before the week is through. Crucio."

Harry woke up screaming. He screamed and screamed, feeling the effect of cruciatus, his blood boiling and his mind burning, and he could not stop the flailing and aftermaths of the crucio stopped, he thankfully gulped in air. He blinked slowly. And sound came back to his ears as sight faded.

"Harry? Harry!"

"Pro.. professor McGonagall..." he managed to utter hoarsely before he slipped into numb oblivion where all sounds were muffled.

Something hot and burning was poured down his throat. He gagged and sputtered, and soon enough everything was loud and clear almost to painful level again.

"Another vision, Harry?" Professor Dumbledore's gentle voice provided an anchor. Harry turned his head toward him even though he could not see him. He nodded.

"They are.. they are all free." he said in a hushed way.

The headmaster's soft and oddly callused hand reassured Harry as it always did. Harry continued.

"Azkaban is empty now... and the Dementors are gone from there. Voldemort wants them recruited by the end of the week."

"Do not worry yourself about this now, my boy. It is all under control. Rest for a while."

"And for pity's sake, stop that sniffing." the ironic lilt made Harry gasp.

"...Professor Snape?"

"I'm here." the voice was tired. Harry heard the Potions Master walk up beside the Headmaster.

"You were not at the gathering?"

"I am busy preparing Tom Riddle's potion, Potter. I was saved the class outing." the sarcasm comforted Harry oddly. He heard Dumbledore stand up.

"I'll leave you and Severus to talk, Harry. I have some... urgent business to attend to." he said merrily as if that urgent business was picking new robes in Madam Malkin's.

Silence reigned in the room as Snape took Dumbledore's chair by Harry's bed. He watched the tired boy, and wondered if he was cruel enough to dump more on him tonight.

"So, Potter..." he started, leaning back.

looks up at the chapter nervously well, longer than last time. I hope everyone's happy. I am so nervous about this again. argh. *Snape sneers and rhe*

Anyhow, as for my reviewers:

shitsumon: Relax! Relax, we don't want you to have a cardiac. *chuckles* Ye, Harry has become sardonic. As for the tapping, Hermione charmed the cane to be heard only to Harry ;) As for blaming him, Hufflepuffs are rather shocked at his new predicament at the moment. As for Fudge... *eats* it's nice with chocolate. ;)

Taineyah: We can't have you crying now, can we? *big grin*

Ice Angel: I promised that making Harry blind would be the furthest I take him from canon. Can't have him turn dark. :)

Katy999: hmmm :) maaaaybe.

nightingale: *shudders with delight* you know how to keep an author happy, too! wonderful review! I don;t know what eventually will happen with Draco-- he won't be a saint, of course. I don't know if he'll be evil. I don't think he has enough hatred in him, and spite and bad manners is not enough when worse comes to worse... or something. I was nervous cos I was worried it would bore people out of their senses... the same as with this one.

rosie: For threats, visit counter 2. *snape grins ferally from counter two* hee hee!

bluestarfish: Here you go! I hope you were satisfied?

Coriel: erh.... with difficulty. *chuckles*

Rei: I don't know! *laughs*

Teigra: He's all yours!

Mikee: you are welcome. I hope you enjoyed :)

kitty: we'll see! But I doubt he'll have to buy a new owl, just yet :)

Lee Lee Potter: glad you liked the stones. They are ancient greek style divination. Sorta.

Crystal Rose Heart: don't worry. I am not too cruel. Lately I get sorted into Gryffindor. *L*

Tinuviel: we'll see! After all, what has ever gone entirely as Voldemort has planned?

Makota: Thanks! however, no slash, sorry :)

Kaat Shadow Lover: *takes them happily* I like any kind of chocies. hee hee. Yes, if he'd killed her, it would have been the first time. *grins* I think he learnt a LOT. *Snape thanks you elegantly for the compliment on his spy technique* *she confers with Snape* we'd like ice cream. *chuckles*

Zardiphillian Beryllix: It was kind of obvious, I know :) Hope you like this chapter.

Kemenran: Good deductions! Thanks!

Angel Baby: Cool! And don't worry-- I am not too evil... *grins up at Snape who looks rather impish*

Blackrose 1356: Is that a trick question? *laughs*

Myk: Nothing. That's the whole point of being a Death Eater, no? *L* And yes, if they ever find out he actually -sees- the humour in the jibes, they will think he's mental, as Ron would say. He does look more confident-- but I think he is the same, but now it is more underlined as it is contrasted with his blindness. Thanks for the compliments! They help!

Lei Dumbledore: Thanks! Hope you liked this one!

Lady Lunar Phoenix: *chuckles* indeed.

Lord R: that would make Harry far too omniscient, no?

Snape walks in looking like he has received severe shock, pats his hand Poor man, he watched me during Parent Night at our english school. It was a traumatising experience for him. *helps him sit in the armchair* there, there...

hee hee.

Okay. I know I have made you wait, but I really was under severe tiredness and had to sleep. But here I come now!

BTW-- I suck as a quidditch game describer-- don't hit me!

Chapter 17, *hits play*

Harry arched an eyebrow at the hue of the potions master's voice. He settled better in his covers, comfortable and warm and oddly enough feeling sheltered. Snape's voice was open enough to make him a Severus, instead of just a Snape... Harry smiled at the thought.

"Yes, Professor?"

Severus shifted in his chair, watching the boy being relaxed and soothed and calm after so long a time of watching him tense and aloof and worried.

"How are you handling things?"

Harry's smile became lopsided.

"Oh, it's manageable, sir."

"Do you remember the first time I came to fetch you for a session?"

Harry shuddered.

"Not -that- part. When I took you to your room." Severus smirked as he folded his arms. Harry chuckled.

"I remember."

"Has any of it, in your opinion, come to pass yet?"

Harry simply nodded. Severus' heart picked up beats. He had something valuable there... something precious that he had built painstakingly, little by little. He did not bear to shatter it.

"That is good, then." he said quickly and started to get up.

"Sir..." Harry's voice stopped him, and he looked at the young gryffindor's face once more.

"Yes, Potter?"

"I never got a chance to thank you, directly..." Harry said softly, and bit his lip. Severus felt his heart sinking, his eyes burning.

"You don't have to Potter-- in fact, just don't. Trust me on that." he said and got up. "Better get some sleep."

Harry was bewildered. He knew how Snape relished in the recognition of others-- after all, he assumed it came so rarely.... so why would he rebuff the thanks of someone that had initially been so negative, combative to him?

What was bothering him? Harry slept with that thought in his mind.

And Severus with that nightmare.

The next few weeks were rather unfriendly to the Potions Master more than anyone else. After all, the Dementors were proven rather more difficult to find and re-assemble again, and the ministry had openly accepted the return of the Dark Lord after the raid in Azkaban. So, Voldemort's big move against Hogwarts did not take place at the full moon the dark lord initially intended.

Fact that had rendered him in such a foul mood that few Death Eaters escaped a meeting with less than two Cruciatus.

What was more, the mysterious Order of the Phoenix was knowing to be active again, although no student -not even Hermione- actually

knew what it was and of who it consisted. What they did know though, was that it provided a resistance to the Dark Lord's ascension to power once again. Hermione believed that it probably had more than aurors-- at least an arithmancer and a runes master, because several attempted hits against prominent or important people of the wizarding community - members of the ministry or aurors, for example - were thwarted.

That made Poppy Pomfrey have a special, separate compartment for things that would be needed to resuscitate Severus Snape back to some semblance of sentient life after every meeting with the Dark Lord he was called to do. The man became thinner, paler, frailer. Snape hid that as best he could from the student body. And in truth, nobody saw this subtle development in the Potions Master.

But Harry saw it.

"They are slowly killing him." he would tell Ron and Hermione, during the day or during the night when he would wake up from nightmares and pad down to the common room to the warmth of the fireplace there. "They are killing him and he is not fighting it."

In the same time, on a lighter note, Harry had also grown somewhat mysterious, and with him, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Fred, George, Remus Lupin and virtually the entirety of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Ron Weasley had made the tryouts for new Keeper, that much was known. But who would be the new Gryffindor seeker was a mystery that not even the best Slytherin, Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff gossipers could not get a crack at. Whenever he was asked, Harry would smile and say 'whoever would be fit for that'. Which was not the answer that was hoped for.

The result of this obscene lack of information was that the upcoming Gryffindor - Ravenclaw quidditch game was awaited with more anticipation than the World Cup itself had been. Draco had been feeling slightly miffed in all the exuberance of getting rid of Potter as a rival Seeker. It was never promising not to know your opponent's secret. And the last week, the Gryffindor Quidditch team did not practice openly or at regular hours, making espionage extremely

difficult with Filch and Mrs. Norris roaming the halls at nights. That made him worry even more. Could it be possible that Potter was still the Seeker? But how?

Remus Lupin went to the secret garden of Poppy Pomfrey and Minerva McGonagall-- which was not secret anymore as all the Gryffindor Quidditch players knew about it and half of the professors, too. It was just after the full moon, and he was feeling decidedly exhausted, but he did not want to stay in his office or his quarters-- he wanted a pleasant, heartening distraction.

So he went to watch the Gryffindor House Quidditch Team practice-- with all of its 7 members flying upwards in the huge domes of the gardens.

"Severus, the time has come."

"My Lord?"

"The Dementors are on our side, our brothers and sisters cannot longer wait," Tom Riddle said calmly, watching Nagini shed her snakeskin. Severus watched the snake produce the rather valuable potions ingredient as well.

"I have given you the potion weeks ago, my Lord." Severus said cautiously. Voldemort nodded.

"Indeed you have, my faithful Potions Master. Now I want you to mix me the Terrianto Clay. And use this in it." he tended Nagini's snake skin and a small vial of black-red blood to Snape, who took them with as much respect he could muster. He was glad he was wearing his mask, or the expression of realisation and fear in his face would not have sat well with the dark lord.

He barely disappeared with enough dignity.

The quidditch pitch was more than packed. Virtually every single student from the first to seventh year, from all four houses were sitting, or actually hanging off the seats waiting for the Ravenclaw

and Gryffindor teams to enter. Madam Hooch walked in with her broom and the box with the balls inside floating beside her.

Lee Jordan casted Sonorus.

"It is a fine morning and we are all waiting to see who the new Gryffindor Seeker is-- who is going to fill Harry Potter's shoes?"

The crowd roared and few actually noticed the smirk on Severus Snape's face, or Minerva McGonagalls. After all they both scowled fervently when a Hufflepuff first year accidentally sent a box of Bertie Botts beans flying into the teacher's box.

"AND HERE THEY COME!" the crowd of students started roaring in excitement as the players flew in with crisp, sharp movements-- and then it suddenly fell completely silent in extreme and utmost surprise.

For the Gryffindor Seeker, was still Harry Potter.

The general question of 'how is this possible' was flying through the seats in variations, and the buzz reached Harry's ears. He grinned as Katie Bell flew up beside him.

"Alright, Harry. This is it. We've stunned them, now we take the house."

"That's my full intention." Harry said to her with a smile and flew up to the center of the pitch with ease-- after all, Sasha was still around his wrist, seeing around the pitch not for balls, but for the general positioning Harry would need to do at the start of the game. As soon as Harry was hovering opposite Cho Chang, he lifted the link between him and the coral snake, and replaced it with a powerful wandless shielding one around her that Madam Hooch had taught him was efficient for small animals. He did not want his second familiar to be squashed by a bludger.

He felt Cho's bewildered stare on him and he smiled.

"Hi, Cho." he said calmly. He was glad he couldn't see her-- he still felt rather hot when he was around, although the feeling had considerably been dampened with guilt after Cedric.

"Erh, hello, Harry..." she stammered.

Madam Hooch gave the starting signal before they had chance to speak any further. Brooms, bludgers, quaffle and the snitch all zoomed towards every direction, but Harry had learned to discern every single sound. He soared on his broom confidently, getting feedback from the sounds around him virtually like a bat. The roaring crowd gave him perfect indication of the borders of the pitch and how high above he was. The brooms made a subtle woosh sound that warned him to dodge. The bludgers went shhhooooing towards people-- they were the easiest to avoid, and so Fred and George did not have to pay too much attention to their seeker-- their job was far easier.

And the Snitch-- the Snitch zzzipped here and there in the lowest, most subtle sound of them all-- it was hard to discern in the whole balderdash of all the other sounds, especially when it guided him close to the crowd. But it was there nonetheless and he pursued it relentlessly.

He only hoped that Lee Jordan would just shut up.

"YYEEEEESS! It seems Harry is not down and out-- he is faster, look at him fly! The bludgers cannot even keep track of him! Whoa! Look at that precarious loops! It's as if he is even more fearless than before! Eek, watch it, Cho, or the bludgers will leave Harry with no opponent! Just you wait your turn, Slytherins and Draco Malfoy!"

At which point Lee's voice was muffled for several minutes by a shouting Minerva and a less-than-pleased Snape.

Harry was grateful for that-- the Snitch zzzipped across from him and he chased after it, dodging the woosh of various brooms with ease he did not expect-- but after all, the rubber balls that Professor Snape kept speeding up in their regular, albeit secret, meetings were just as fast and much less noisy, lately.

He was so intent on the zipping, erratic, fleeting sound of the snitch coming closer and closer as he accelerated even more he almost disregarded the shhhhhoooo that was steadily growing closer and closer to him-- it was only when red alarms went off in his head and Sasha hissed in fear that he dodged and the bludger glanced off his shoulder. The pain stunned Harry for a while and the Snitch drew away along with a woosh over his head going right for it-- Cho Chang, no doubt.

He sped up, his shoulder screaming in protest and the zip and woosh came closer and closer-- until he was certain he was right under Cho Chang.

I have to win this. I must not lose. Harry kept the thought in his mind and flipped upside down, and in this flipped-over manner he edged so close to Cho that he could feel her robes flapping over him. Naturally, the girl saw him and drew upwards, putting more distance between her and teh Snitch. Harry smiled and speeded up once more, reaching out before Cho could correct her mistake.

"HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH! Who would believe it!" Lee Jordan was shouting himself hoarse.

Harry landed smoothly, and lifted the cool ball in his hand for all to see. He smiled brightly.

Nobody was laughing now.

And that's it! Short again, but I have to end it here thematically-- we enter the 3rd part with chapter 18!

Also, my GREAT reviewers, I am in a huge rush at the moment-- so I will answer to all your reviews tomorrow, including any that you drop me for this chapter. Thanks again!

walks in with Snape, who prepares endless coffee amounts, sits near the fireplace, lights candles

hey, you did not lynch me after chapter 17, so here I come!

Anyhow, the last chapter was a transitional one, as some of you mentioned, necessary to set the levels of every character's scope... sorta. Okay. This is the 3rd and final part of the story. I hope it will be as exciting for you as the rest have been.

Allrighty... *crosses fingers* *Snape reclines with brandy tumbler*

Chapter 18 *hits play*

Snape made himself scarce after the whole school was reeling with excitement and surprise -positive or negative- about Harry Potter and his seemingly unlimited capacities. He knew the boy would make a beeline for the infirmary after that hit he got by the bludger. So he headed there. He had seen the look of strength and confidence on Harry's face. He would not break now.

Of course that would also not prevent Snape from shattering the brittle amity that had been established between them over the last few months.

It would not be the first time, and certainly not the last. Snape steeled himself and decided that he would not be cowardly anymore over this, and he would not avoid Dumbledore's eyes with their subtle question of whether he had had 'the Talk' with the Golden Boy. You cannot avoid disaster... and if you don't face it, it will eventually hit you over the head. His self told him as he walked with leisure towards the infirmary.

Besides, whatever Harry Potter's reaction would be, Snape more than deserved it. And he would take it, just like all the punishment he gladly took for his mistakes and crimes.

Indeed, Harry was chattering happily with Weasley and Granger, sitting up in his bed and looking ready to jump off the minute Pomfrey was out of earshot. Which she would be pretty soon, as her lunch

break was coming up. He strode in and put up a scowl for the benefit of the other two teens, who quietened when they saw him.

"I'd like to have a word or two in private with Mr. Potter. If you do not mind." he sneered in his most acidic way-- which was not the best he had ever achieved as he was not feeling at all in control of what he was about to initiate. It was the reason that over the past weeks he had initiated and then shrunk away from actually going through with it so many times.

The look of bewilderment on Potter's face every time he walked away leaving conversations hanging was quite amusing, although usually Snape was too distressed to appreciate it.

If Weasley was going to protest, Granger just pulled him out of the infirmary before he had a chance to. Snape drew up a chair near Harry's bedside as the boy knit his hands together. Sasha, the snake he had given him, was somewhat visible now without a robe hiding her, like a faint glimmer around the boy's wrist. He smiled to see that Harry was so protective of her.

"Your sessions with Madam Hooch paid off." Snape started off cuttingly.

"Yes, they did, sir. Thank you."

"I do not recall being baptised 'Matty Hooch'."

Harry chuckled. He was in too good a mood to be frustrated with anything.

"Her method and approach was suspiciously familiar, sir."

Snape shifted. The atmosphere was far too flippant and cozy and... accepting, inviting the cowardly feeling of chickening out and not starting the conversation he came to make with the young gryffindor. He saw Poppy leaving the infirmary with a wary glance towards him. The coast was as clear as it would get. He savoured the atmosphere for as long a pause as he could afford before the boy asked some

inane question that would tempt him even more to let the subject he wanted pass unmentioned, took a deep breath and started.

"I am not here to congratulate you."

His tone was glacial and the previous atmosphere faded as Harry's expression became guarded-- though it was still open. Too open for Snape's liking, for the possibility of hurt that the boy was going to suffer.

Harry did not answer, making the new pause elevate the tension. Snape reverted to his neutral, indifferent tones as he passed the point of no return.

"I want you to recall the last time you were at the Dursleys."

Harry was truly shocked. He rarely knew what to expect from Snape, but to have him revert to that painful day which he had buried as deeply inside him as humanly possible, on the very day of his triumph, sounded too much like underhandedness or betrayal. He clenched his teeth, his left hand fingering the skin-tight tawn glove over his burn marks.

"Why." he spat.

"Because it is important, Potter, obviously. I assure you it is not a pleasant memory for me, either."

"If you want me to thank you for getting me from them, I thought I already had." the young boy snapped back, turning his face from the potions master more as a non-verbal message than anything else. Snape clicked his tongue.

"That is not my intent. I need to know something specific."

"Why would you need to know anything about those people, or what had happened?" Harry said aggressively.

"I am asking you, and I demand an answer!" Snape snapped in exasperation.

"I don't even know what it is you are asking!" Harry snapped back in equal anguish. He did not want to remember anything from then. Even when at times he dreamt about it at night, he forced himself to wake up and go back to sleep only when he would be certain the dream would not show up again.

"When did the man hit you? It is important, Potter!" Snape asked directly, and with a roughness that did not sit well with Harry, especially due to the fact he was being forced to recall the incident all too vividly.

"Why? why is it so important? why? and why now of all times!?" the boy cried out.

Snape did the only thing he could in defense of what was to come with his reply: he surrounded himself with as much stonyness and ice as he possibly could to answer in his most indifferent way:

"Because I want to know if by delaying my coming to rescue you after Dumbledore told me to cost you your eyesight."

Harry didn't seem to understand, but his expression closed quickly.

"Delayed? I don't understand."

Snape steeled himself.

"When Dumbledore said you were in danger, I did not... entirely... well, I did not rush to your rescue. I came quite a bit later." he said calmly.

The cold hatred that made the atmosphere terrible to tolerate was nothing in contrast to Harry's surprised, expression where anger and utmost loathing battled for dominance. The boy's breathing became erratic as he clutched at his bedsheets with white knuckles. Snape heard Sasha hiss and Harry cut her off in Parseltongue. He clenched his teeth, shut his eyes and looked away, knowing that disaster had occurred, and punishment was upon him, as in so many times when he committed crimes. It was not that he had not expected the reaction.

He just did not expect the irrational urge to cry and ask for forgiveness from the boy. Of course, he would never do that. That was beyond his capacity to do more than once. And Snape had already cried and asked for forgiveness once in his lifetime. He breathed evenly to make sure he had control of his voice.

"You really hate me so much, don't you, that out of all the days in the year you picked THIS one!" Harry said venomously with chagrin and heartache that Snape felt like dying. Still, what was done, was done.

"Did it, Potter?"

"Why won't you just let me be? Why did you have to ask me today?" Harry's voice escalated, his eyes, perhaps because they were unfocused, getting across all the turmoil of his soul. Snape covered his own eyes from the sight, knowing that the gesture would be lost on Harry and therefore would have no effect on the situation. He said in a low, tired voice:

"Did it?"

"I will not tell you!"

"Potter--"

"Never!"

"Harry --"

"Never! I will never tell you, you- you- Death Eater! You will just have to wonder about it!" Harry screamed at him in unleashed anger.

It was ironic, but Harry's call of Snape being a Deatheater hurt him more than any kind of swear word ever could.

And speaking of it, the Dark Mark flared under Snape's skin, making his blood feel vile and poisonous, the shearing pain reaching up to his brain. He got up to go. Harry breathed even more heavily as he heard

the chair scrape against the floor and he shouted after the retreating Potions Master:

"You will never know!"

Of course, Harry could not see the hunching of the shoulders and the lowering of the head as if Snape had received a physical blow.

Albus Dumbledore walked in Remus Lupin's office. The DADA professor greeted him with a wide smile.

"Did you see that game, Headmaster? That should have been recorded in the Exceptional Quidditch issue of the decade 2010!" Remus said with elation. The Headmaster smiled, his eyes twinkling, but he quickly became serious.

"Remus, I need you to go console Harry. He should be in the infirmary."

Remus frowned, confused.

"Console him? He should be partying!"

"Yes, but he isn't. Not because of the game, of course. I believe he has just finished a very painful conversation with Severus." Dumbledore said with an inward wince.

"What sort of conversation?" Remus asked guardedly. By the time Dumbledore was done explaining, Remus was running full speed at the infirmary, making a mental note to beat Snape senseless and then give him a pep talk as well. His mind was boggled at the odd, tangled situations the man created for himself.

The DADA professor walked in the infirmary gently. It appeared that Poppy had not returned to the medical ward. It was, after all, the matron's lunch break. Gentle sobbing permeated the otherwise serene room. Remus bit his lip and went over to Harry's bed quickly. He sat at the side of the bed and laid a gentle hand on the shaking shoulder. Harry's now bony, agile fingers buried further in the pillow they were clutching.

"I hate him. I wish he died. Why did he DO this to me?"

Remus swallowed. He stroked the untamed black hair quietly. The sobbing was gradually reduced to heavy breathing.

"Why did he have to TELL me..." Harry said tiredly, shifting so that he could feel the gentle touch of his father's friend.

"Because that's how Severus is." Remus said gently, quietly. He heard Harry take in his breath shakily. Remus continued:

"Severus chases after justice, Harry. He invites punishment when he feels he is worthy of it."

"It doesn't seem that way to me." Harry said stubbornly.

"But it is." Remus smiled as he saw the boy turn to be on his back instead of keeping his face buried in the pillow.

"I can't see it." Harry shut his eyes and petted with his forefinger where Remus suspected Sasha's head to be-- he could only see a faint echo of the snake's multicoloured body where light hit against it.

"Yes you can. You are only too angry to admit it openly." Remus said. Harry sighed and bit his lip. A long, long silence passed between the student and the professor. Harry was no longer breathing hard. He was contemplating, his eyes staring at the ceiling unmovingly, yet in the playing all the passing emotions as he thought about the previous scene. Remus said gently.

"Think about it as a Slytherin would-- in terms of loss and gain. What did you lose by his revelation?"

Harry swallowed.

"Peace of mind... my joy for winning today."

Remus nodded, then said so Harry could have the feedback:

"Yes. And what did Severus lose?"

"Points in my esteem of him." Harry said seriously, then smirked ironically, realising what that statement subtly implied.

"Now, what did Severus gain from this?"

Harry took his time answering. At first, he considered saying 'my extreme distress'. But he knew that to be wrong. After all, he had spent enough time with the Potions Master to know that the man did not relish in Harry's true, heartfelt distress or sorrow, even if he did like pulling on his chain on all other occasions. In Harry's mind flashed the moment when he was weak, easily crushed, fearful of the darkness which he now did not mind and almost embraced... and how Snape had supported him instead of taking him apart. So it would be wrong to think that the Potions Master had aimed at wringing Harry's heart. Then what? No matter how much he pressed his mind, no answer came. He sat up a little, his mind racing as he said tentatively:

"He gained... nothing."

Remus smiled, watching Harry and the fluctuations of his expression. It was easier than he expected to point the young Gryffindor in the right direction. He wondered if Snape had also made the same thoughts when he had first sat down to work with the teen.

"I think I will agree with you. And now, think: what did you gain?"

Harry felt the surprise of the answer his mind provided rush in like a cool breath of refreshing, but also uncomfortable air.

"The right to pass judgement on him."

The thought was staggering. And even more staggering for Harry, was the motive Severus Snape had in order to offer Harry access to a knife already in a wound, for him to twist. And Harry had twisted. He had wanted to, too.

Remus broke into his thoughts.

"Harry... did his delay really cost you..." he trailed off. Harry bit his now trembling lower lip, although no urge to cry or shed tears came as he answered the DADA professor the question that had been haunting Snape for months.

Draco was still sitting in his seat in the quidditch pitch. It was now completely empty of both players and spectators. The chilly October breeze made the young slytherin shiver but he barely took notice. The sky was heavy with the storm that was rapidly approaching, but Draco did not care.

Up to then, Draco Malfoy was hateful and vindictive towards Harry Potter and his ability to crawl through a sewer full of shit and come out smelling like roses. But the game he had just watched was mind boggling. Without wanting to, Draco felt respect for the gryffindor. Deep respect.

It was a sentiment he had for nobody. He smirked to himself as he realised that he had no real concept of the word 'respect' until that very moment. With that thought, another was linked that shocked the teen.

He did not respect his father. And he certainly did not respect Voldemort.

He blinked. Had he just thought of You-Know-Who's name and did not shiver? He gave it another shot.

"Voldemort." he said in a whisper. He arched an intrigued eyebrow as he saw that the name did not make any more impression on him than the name Grindelwald. Perhaps it was just numbness from shock? He tried again.

"Voldemort." he whispered again. Still no shiver, no prickling of the skin came.

"Voldemort!" he called out loud. Still nothing. For a moment he paused, the realisation too big to even allow him to breathe.

Then, Draco started laughing. Heartily, with no venom, with no sarcasm or pretense. Pure, warm, relieved laughter. He stood up, spread his arms wide, throwing his head backwards to feel the rain that was starting to fall against his face.

"Voldemort!" he shouted in the loud thunder, and laughed again as the rain in seconds was falling heavily, drenching his clothes and washing away the fear that had kept him restrained and play acting. Potter had done it again, and even if he still felt like snarling the not-so-well sounding name of his red-and-gold opponent, he felt the warm waves of respect wake his heart from the slumber it had been under all his childhood and up to now. He shut his eyes and felt the heavy raindrops of the first few moments of his life.

He was free of the fate he had been bound to. He was his own self.

Snape apparated into an abandoned cemetery. Looking around, he saw Lucius, Avery and Nott. Then it seemed that Voldemort, along with his sniffling companion, materialised from behind the tall, weatherbeaten stone slabs and mossy statuettes. As was expected of them, all Death Eaters present bowed.

"My fellow Death Eaters. The time for the initiation of our final supremacy over the wizarding world has come. And we will start with Hogwarts and Dumbledore."

Snape swallowed. He only hoped to have enough time to warn the Headmaster-- or if that failed, that Potter would be watching this. Or that the Clay he had made and delivered a few days before to the Dark Lord would not serve its purpose. Like the other Death Eaters, he swished his wand over the graves.

And that's that. *sighs* I hope you like this chapter. It was fun to write, but I am nervous that you will not like it. As you can understand, things will get hairy pretty soon. *shivers, Snape rolls the brandy, chugs it and pours another* *bites nails in nervousness*

by the way, did you notice that one of Harry's three predictions came true?

And now to answer the reviews! Both from chapters 16 and 17!

phreakreader: *blushes* I hope you still believe so after this. ch16 questions: Snape does not appreciate divination much, so no he wouldn't, even now. ;) *Snape is flattered and nods to you in thanks*

Mallallou: um, no, there will be no slash in this story. And I think Snape would never think of looking towards Harry for an affair, even if he was concerned with stuff like that. C'est simplement bizarre. ;) Merci beaucoup!

alliy: thanks :)

Laterose: *chuckles* yes, but now it's official.

Lord R: thank you *s* As for Draco, yes, a conscience is an inconvenience at such occasions. Anyhow, after Hedwig, Harry will be taking a leaf off moodys book, methinks. ;)

Katy 999: yes, it will be interesting, won't it?

JaimynsFire: hee hee. Snape chickened out! But we knew he would, didn't we? *wink wink*

floramoranda: *bows* thank you!

Jordan: I am glad you think so! I was afraid people would be put off by my take on quidditch.

Phoenix Flight: wow! I am honoured! In the words of Iago the parrot: "Gee, I'm embarrassed, I'm flushing!" hee hee. As for Harry starting to be depended on cane and wand, I'd feel safe because he can use neither for quidditch... so there you go.

Lee Lee Potter: yep, he chickened out!

Vanessa: here it is. Hope it's up to standard.

Zardiphillian Beryllix: well, -almost- tomorrow. *sheepish* I was aiming for it, but alas, work has a way of catching up with you.

candleot: thanks! I was terrified of writing it myself! And yes, Draco completely misreads Snape... heh.

Jaycee: Snape getting mushy? perhaps... though 'awkward' was what I was trying to do. Or at least 'escapist'. *chuckles* I don't know if Harry is ever going to tell-- or have the chance to.

Kaat Shadow Lover: *accepts short cake with drooped ears* ack. I plead guilty. I hope this chapter is enough refund? At least I am glad you did not hit me bout the quidditch match.

excessivelyperky: thanks! As for doing it strictly through Harry's POV, well, I would only be interested in writing it that way. I am not too much of a sports fan, you see.

sweetnessspy: I highly doubt it, as wormtail took very little blood of Harry's back in the end of GoF.

Makota: me too! I think Draco's being wasted as he is. *chuckles*

Melissa Lupin: great! I was scared of the quidditch scene.

shitsumon: I don't think Lee has a capacity to shut up. *chuckles* as for Snape, he has found himself oddly too fond of Harry to distress him, but well... you just saw what happened. As for your ch16 questions: she charmed it under adult supervision. So it was ok. Hufflepuffs are not shocked anymore, but they have other stuff to be impressed with. heh.

JadedKatrina: *Professor Snape allows a small smile but snorts about the coffee* don't bother... he just won't. *sighs* *s* thanks.

Lirael: because she was surprised to see Harry be the seeker. :) And Snape is.. *drumroll* Harry's Potions Professor. *laughs*

*dust: well, here you go, regular size chapter. I don't know if Snape and Harry bonded, though.. O.o

Myk: thank you so much. Positive feedback (and constructive criticism when it is needed) help me so much.

Nataly Ravenlock: Thank you! I love Snape, and it was a challenge to keep him a git in this one. I am glad you appreciate. As for bashing Harry-- I think it can be an excellent plot device, as long as it is used properly ;)

NightSpear: I watched quidditch in the movies. It makes a faint sound. Harry practiced a LOT. Of course it is very hard, but of course, Harry being Harry... just felt like Aking Lee. ;)

Angel Baby: Can't tell you that, only Severus knows such potions. *Snape rhe* I am glad you liked the last chapter. I admit I did not read it over. And I can't tell you what Severus knows, cos he simply won't tell me, either. hehe.

Kemenran: I shouldn't be telling you this, but there was an X-Files episode with golems... *hint hint* Not too much of a hint, but that's where I thought of them. The rest of the questions have more or less been answered, I think :)

Tigergirl: indeed it's odd, but in the same time normal, I think. After all, continuous exposure to someone makes you more positive towards them. It's a human behavior rule.

Darkhorse: yes, there is a partial invisibility spell on Sasha. Draco is at a very transitional point at the moment... so we'll see.

SB: I do not appreciate contorting the characters too much either. After all, if you do that too much, they are not who they are except in name...

Mikee: well... the truth, pretty much. See how elegant he was in his dumping? *ducks Snape's tumbler flying at her*

Black Rose: cuddle him?? *L* he'd shock Harry into a coma.

kitty: Sev/Harry bonding is a very... difficult thing. But I could say yes as much as I could say no. It's really up to you to decide. They do understand each other better, or will, I think.

Satyrn Rain: thank you. *s* I hope you are still reading. I like to share.

chips challenge: I guess he is not! *grin*

Tinuviel: I apologise. I can't help it. heh. After all, Snape chickened out the first time, and needed some 3 weeks to work up the courage.

kateydidn't: Draco is actually re-discovering the world, so he is surprised about many things. *chuckles*

t.a.g.: and there you go. I am also curious to see what Draco will do now. Honestly!

sarah: you are very right! VERY very right.(about the quidditch showing off). as for how dumbledore and snape call each other... sorry. *chuckles* I was under the impression that they do. I think all teachers call each other by their first name.. oh well. Also about sirius, he is not one of my strengths, but I do guess that he can be distressed enough to forget pretext when faced with something as monumental as his godson being blinded... right?

Tonia Barone: I do not mind being flooded. *L* I love it. And you are true and correct in all respects. I am glad you are enjoying this.

hp lovar: I'm 24 years old :)

Aimee Mariesky: That's my intent ;)

nightingale: I like the long reviews. DOn't worry about reviewing every single chapter. *chuckles* About Harry's quidditch ability, I di NOT intend it to sound like Daredevil. I saw the movie and frankly, I was disappointed... I did not mean that he saw anything, like the movie showed, but just that the sound strength told him where the pitch ended is all. He does not see things like a radar, nor is it any supernatural force that he is developping. As for Draco, I wanted to show that he has a crack in this 'macho deatheater kid' thing, which is

why he could read Hedwig's fear. And because I want to portray him as himself fearing his folks and everybody else, he connected to that fear and then could not go through with the kill. As for kids wondering about Sasha, well, perhaps they did. But I doubt they would do much about it. And since their DADA prof was not ruffled or puzzled, they would probaby follow his lead and pretend they know all about it anyway. It happens with kids. As for Harry stopping quidditch, I think he will. But at the moment he is fervently trying to make a point to himself and others. And it is also a plot twist that I need :p And I do not think any kind of constructive criticism or inquiry is negative. Truly, don't feel bad or anything.

walks in with Snape, nursing a large mug of mystery coffee awww, he made me a whole night's supply of it for today's chapter! *bats eyelids up at him as Snape rolls his eyes*

Well well... things are coming to a climax... There are not many chapters left. Two, three at the most or so, I think. We will see. ;)

So, let's see what happens, eh? I am as curious as you are!

Chapter 19 *hits play*

The ground seemed to be pulsating, rippling like a blanket covering forms tossing and turning. The slabs of stone shivered as they relinquished part of the soil enveloping the dead underneath them. Voldemort moulded the Clay that Snape had made for him, just as he had commanded. The whole graveyard emanated a sickly reddish yellow glow as the Clay merged with the soil engulfing it. The death-filled soil the numerous graves had donated under the compelling of the Death Eater wands fused with the blood-moulded Clay...

... and under the strong red-yellow glow, the deed was done.

Voldemort raised his hands, chanting to the earthish, large forms standing before him.

"Sanguis Obeir Ameth!" he said in triumph, and Snape felt even dirtier, even more a criminal than before, simply because he had aided the Dark Wizard. The word AMETH appeared in bloody-looking letters on the faceless foreheads of the Golems. Harry Potter's accusation burdened heavily on Snape's soul. You Death Eater... you Death Eater...

You will never know!

Snape had never really hoped absolution would be for a man such as himself. He straightened up, watching Tom Riddle complete the bond with the Golems, which was possible because of the blood, his very own, that he had given Snape to include in the Clay. For a moment, Snape held his breath, expecting the Dark Lord to turn to him

accusingly. But Voldemort did not do anything of the sort. The Potions Master breathed. He had not been found out just yet.

His jaw set decisively. He had a mission to do, a task that he had chosen to undertake as the minimum compensation to the crimes of his youth-- and he would do it. He only hoped that the Parchment had reached the Order's Unspeakable in time... he had not had the time to warn Dumbledore himself. Had those he was truly loyal to been alerted in time?

You will never know!

"Ssseverus, the Multiplication Potion..." Voldemort commanded, and the Potions Master stepped forward with a light blue vial. He braced himself, as he stood dwarfed before the three Golems, earthen statues, soon to be turned into lethal, unbeatable warriors of the Darkness only because they had no soul nor mind. Flicking his wand, Snape coaxed the liquid out of the vial it had been resting in, and commanded it to divide in three equal parts-- then he shut his eyes behind his mask as he swished his wand, and the potion splashed against the Golems.

God have mercy on my soul.

The Unspeakable of the Order of the Phoenix wrote fervently with several dicta-quills, so that his handwriting would not be detected or traced back to him. There was no time to lose.

The Arithmancer of the Order of the Phoenix surveilling the rippling of magic in Nature had alerted the Unspeakable of the tremendous shift of magic in the Earth-- of the pulsating of great energy, of the trapping of it in far too little soil. The Golem was created, and this time it would not be a protector.

The Potions Master of the Order had sent to the Unspeakable the message in the special Apparating Parchment that the Clay was summoned. And so, the Unspeakable wrote in multiple letters to the ministry Aurors that the Order of the Phoenix was calling upon them in the name of the oath they had given to fight for the better good, their oath to protect against Evil.

And the Call of the Order was higher than any Minister.

So, the Unspeakable whispered in crisp staccato:

"The Order has decreed: The Golem is awoken, the Dark Lord is close to gaining the Power. The Night of all Nights is close at hand; The Attack will be at Hogwarts. Be ready for all, be prepared. Do not waste any time.

The Order Summons All Aurors and Fighters of Good Tonight. Do not answer this Call, and be forever Damned."

The apparating parchments popped away as the dicta-quills fell to the side, reaching every single Auror pledged to the Order throughout England.

The Unspeakable passed his hand over his face, allowing a brief fragment of a second for the dread of what might happen overtake him. Then he steeled himself. This was not the time for fear. This was time for upkeeping oaths and promises: An Oath to the Order, a Promise to his dead friend, a Debt to his godson.

Sirius Black shifted into the Grim, and ran towards Hogwarts at full speed.

Draco Malfoy received an owl after curfew. He frowned. Owls from his father at this time of the evening were never good. They always were about Voldemort, and about him delivering information that as a student he could know, about going to places Snape would not be supposed, as a teacher, to venture into without reason, about dirtywork that the full-fledged Deatheater that was heading his House looked down upon.

With a disgusted sneer, Draco opened the parchment.

Draco

The time to prove your loyalty to the Dark Lord, Master of Darkness and Magic has come. Get out of there, and take all true Slytherins

with you. The rest will all die. If you want to be singled out and praised by our Master, try to weaken Harry Potter as much as possible but do NOT use anything lethal on the boy-- the honour of killing him is for our Master alone.

Your task, however is not the above. You are to cast the Dark Mark at exactly midnight tonight.

Do not mess this up or I will kill you myself.

Lucius Malfoy

Draco made a face. At least Lucius had not signed it 'your father' after the last, charming display of affection.

Draco leaned back, thinking to himself as he gazed into the fireplace, the flames burning his cheeks and forehead. What was going to happen tonight? What good would it do to cast the Dark Mark under Dumbledore's nose? Draco would not be led to believe that the Headmaster would be intimidated by such an act-- more likely alerted. Why would Voldemort throw away his element of surprise so flippantly?

Draco perhaps did not like Dumbledore, but he respected the man's perseverance... and the fact that he had already vanquished one terrible Dark Lord. Draco reasoned that now, with more experience on his back we could take on Voldemort and come out a winner as well. He read over the parchment once again. Weaken Harry Potter... but leave him for Voldemort.

Then, Voldemort was coming here.

The silver haired Slytherin had not yet decided what to do with his newly savoured deliverance-- he still did not like Harry and his obvious superiority to hardships that Draco would have folded under. He did not particularly like Dumbledore and he absolutely despised Lupin and his sugary compassion for everyone weak. And he wouldn't be too sorry if a couple of over frivolous mudbloods were scraped from the earth-- not because of their mixed origins, but because they were a disgrace to the intelligence of Man. He still

admired Snape and the dark eeriness around the tall, sinister professor, his wit and cunning, his elegance and his unmitigated talent to the subtle Art he was teaching.

Truly, Draco did not know if he wanted to side with Dumbledore, when he did not like half of those consisting that side.

He sighed as he got up and exited the Slytherin common room without a sound. He had taken his decision as spontaneously as he had thrown away his ties of fear, but this time he was aware of why he was heading to the Headmaster's office with his father's parchment in hand.

Draco would die first before he allowed the Dark Mark to be burned into his arm, before he allowed his life, his essence and his soul to be enslaved to a snake-like abomination that couldn't even pronounce things properly.

A small fat rat with a glowing paw strutted quickly across the stone floors in Hogwarts castle, directing himself to Gryffindor tower. He did not need to go through a portraithole. Scabbers had spent a lot of time in this place, and he knew the little crack through which he could enter the Tower. He was sent to fetch someone, and he would.

The only thing that bothered him, was that there was a pestering Debt that could interfere with his mission. He did not know if it would, as he had conveniently forgotten to mention to Voldemort its existence.

Harry was sitting in the Gryffindor Common room, scowling into the fire. Ron and Hermione were occupying other chairs, trying to get him to talk to them.

"Harry, let us help you," Hermione said beggingly.

"You should be bouncing off the walls after that game, man, what's the matter with you?"

"RON! You git!"

"You want to know what is the matter with me?" Harry said in a low, dangerous voice. His two friends hushed, unsure. Hermione shifted unconsciously more towards Ron than Harry. When anger filled Harry's unmoving, unfocused, unforgiving eyes, chills went up and down her spine, as ache filled her heart. At those times, Harry seemed dangerous. As dangerous as Snape himself, Ron had once confided in her.

"Snape came to ask me a question, something important to him and I refused him! I let him go to where he can die and did not let him know what he wanted!" Harry cried out aggressively. Both his friends could see how the young Gryffindor was vexed and self-condemning.

"What was that, Harry?"

"I don't want to talk about it, 'Mione. It is even more obscene to have everyone know when I refused him the answer, after all he did for me, after covering for me all this time." Harry rubbed his temples. He breathed shakily.

"I knew this would happen-- I had found it in Divination. The stones had shown a Standoff-- and it came, a Standoff with Snape. I knew it would come, and I did not prepare, I did not prevent it. And now he might die with guilt he does not deserve." he said quietly, sadly. Hermione bit her lips, and knew better than to say Divination was bull. Harry added as an afterthought:

"I won't dismiss the other two predictions."

Ron opened his mouth to say something unflattering about Divination and Trelawney, when Harry shushed him, sitting up like a lemur, listening intently.

"What is it, Harry?" Hermione whispered, but Harry made a frustrated gesture at her to be silent.

"Shhh, let me listen!" he said, trying desperately to focus on the sound neither of his two friends could hear-- but by now they were well aware that Harry could hear many things they did not.

However, all three heard the 'pop'... but by then it was too late, as Peter Pettigrew had his wand already pointed to Ron and Hermione, and stunned them to the ground.

Harry had his wand pointed at the man by that time, but Peter said in a shaky, intimidated voice:

"Don't do it, Harry, or I will hurt you!"

Harry got up, a terrible expression on his face.

"You will not leave this place alive, Wormtail. Killer of Cedric Diggory and who knows how many other innocents! I am going to kill you!"

"No you won't!" squeaked Peter, "because your friends are now lying in front of me, and I will kill at least one of the two before your curse hits me, IF it hits me. You are blind! I know you are blind!" he added in his uncertain, fidgety, rattish way.

Harry's wand wavered. The rat was correct-- he could not be sure to aim correctly without saying 'Ento', and he would be sacrificing Ron or Hermione before Avada Kedavra hit Cedric's killer. But he could not allow this peril to befall upon his friends while he idly stood by-- Harry's eyes widened just a bit, making Peter a little more uneasy.

Friendly Peril...

Harry's eyes flashed. He would not dismiss the prediction.

"Do you think you can hurt me, you worthless piece of shit?" he spat at Wormtail, walking around him, smiling ferally. Peter did not expect that. He had heard of Harry's progress due to Hooch, Lupin and Dumbledore, despite Snape's attempts to crush the boy, but he had not expected to actually see a strong warrior in place of a 15 year old teenager.

"Do you think I can't see you? That I do not hear your heavy breathing, I do not smell your filthy sweat on you, that I cannot feel your eyes on me?" Harry continued saying in the silky, velvety, mesmerizing voice of a cobra hypnotizing its victim.

A voice that only Snape used to feature.

Harry heard the shaky intake of breath implying Peter's unpleasant surprise. And he acted in the lightning quick way he owed the Potions Master.

"Translocus Ron and Hermione!" he bellowed, the spell he used not needing aim. The prone bodies of his friends popped away before Wormtail had the chance to react. The blind Gryffindor had transported them to some other place within the enclosure... but Wormtail did not have the luxury to look for them.

He therefore acted on his initial threat with the most painful curse he could think of.

"Crucio!"

Remus Lupin and Albus Dumbledore ran to the Gryffindor tower, from where the screams of the Boy-Who-Lived came, bloodcurdling and horrible. Everything was happening so fast. Draco ran after them, if only because he was curious to see who had had the nerve and the skill to enter into Hogwarts undetected, all the way to Gryffindor tower, past the Portrait only to cast -Cruciatius- at Harry, instead of swiftly killing him.

That ruled out Voldemort.

Then, just as they were about to barge through the Fat Lady's portrait, the cries of pain stopped. Pitterpatter of terrified students was heard and the portrait was flung open. Pale, scared Gryffindors poured out, some to get help in the panic, others just to hide, and nearly all overlooking the Headmaster and the Professor.

Fred and George Weasley did not.

"Come quickly, a Death Eater has-- Harry, just come quickly!" they blurted out in variations, as the two wizards barged through the sea of confused and panicky students and into the common room. Surprise was on both their faces at the sight they met:

Harry Potter was lying on the floor at an odd angle, spasms going through his body from the Unforgivable torture curse. His eyes were inverted, and Sasha, his coral snake familiar was fully visible around the convulsing wrist, hissing worriedly yet not fleeing. Harry's invisibility spell had ended when the boy was cursed unconscious. That was not what surprised them.

Opposite Harry was the crumpled form of Peter Pettigrew, his eyes wide in pain as he clutched at his heart, his life ebbing from his body. Remus grabbed him in anger, his wolfish eyes flashing yellow in his rage, but Peter only gasped:

"...wizard's debt... boy... used it cleverly..."

Then, nothing more was said. Peter Pettigrew was dead, the wizard's bond taking its toll when he disregarded his Debt.

By that time Dumbledore had charmed some energy and soothing in Harry, and his eyes opened, his breathing became a little less shallow.

"... did it work?" he asked in a whisper at the Heamaster holding him.

"Yes, Harry." Dumbledore said gently.

Harry smiled thinly as he felt himself slipping into the nurturing numbness of unconsciousness. He had thrown himself in Peril, but it had shielded him from Wormtail's plans for him... and in that sense, it indeed was more than friendly.

There you go! *looks around nervously* do you hate me? Was it satisfactory? Gosh I am so nervous I can't sit still! Please tell me! I tried as hard as I could to get across what I wanted. Did your heart beat even a LITTLE bit faster? *Snape laces his mystery coffee with something even stronger*

As for my wonderful reviewers!

Pose: *bows* thank you very much!

Lord R: You flatter me *blushes* thank you. I hope this chapter is up to standard as well.

Lady Lunar Phoenix: No, Harry cannot affect the Dark Mark. It was just coincidence. Or fate ;) Whichever you prefer.

Barbara: Eh... up to you to decide. *s*

Bonnie Wee Dragon: *hands you a hanky* don't worry, I cry with stories too.

Angel Baby: For the readers, there is a reply to your question, if you can find it in the chapter... as to how guilty Snape is about Harry's sightlessness, I mean.

nightningale: Dumbledore indeed told Remus a LOT more than just dry facts. Which is why Remus feels for Severus as well. I think that Remus can understand Snape anyway, even from the PoA book, where he is even accepting to him, sorta. As for Draco being the unexpected ally... hmm... Couls be. Certainly looks like it, doesn't it? But why does it have to be a person? *snickers* I think the rest of the questions are answered by the chapter. *grins* Somewhat at least. And stop being nervous about me taking your questions or comments wrong. I LIKE your reviews. I wait for them every time.

chips challenge: I do believe that Remus was the brains behind the Marauders, Sirius the action and James the charm. Peter was probably the alibi. *laughs* With all the sniffing.

jaycee: Snape might never know, as Harry shouted at him... *very evil gleam in eyes* but you can have your answer by this chapter, if you find it... ;)

Sinner's Angel: *blushes* thanks! Now if only I could get an agent for my -own- book.

Jordan: I am studying for midterms and working full time... sorry if I delayed more than usual. But here I am. *ss*

kitty: like I said, answer can be found in the chapter.

Lee Lee Potter: *chuckles* Snape thought Harry would be confident and strong enough to go back to that day at that particular time... he was mistaken *L* or wasn't he? Thanks for the compliments *dodges haddocks*

phreakreader: I agree, but I wouldn't not give Severus more alcohol than he already opts to drink. *chuckles* might end up being used in pyromanic ways. *Snape snorts and sips brandy*

Zardiphillian Beryllix: here you go! Hope the chapter answered questions.

Kaat Shadow Lover: hee hee, I need something strong too *chuckles and grabs the bottle from Sev's hands* *he scowls* Let's hope they DO live through this attack. After all, someone is supposed to die in this year, no? I am thinking if I should follow that hint JK has dropped.

fyre: Thanks! I hope this chapter is up to standard as well. As for Sirius, I think that just like Snape, he is a wildcard and could be anything. Just look what *I* did with him! *chuckles* No wonder Fudge was not allowed in Order meetings or given an Order member list.

Ethereal: um, thanks. *sag*

amadeus: *laughs crazily, even Snape smirks* gosh that made me laugh for quite some time! I will try to knit this in the story before it ends. Wonderful quote!

shitsumon: *chuckles* Captain Haddock would suggest duct tape, but the brat is a wizard. heh. *chuckles and gives Harry Aretha's pink slippers and white apron*

Tinuviel: *hands you a gold star* You were the only one that figured out where I got that scene from! Yep, that is indeed borrowed from when Andy finally escapes. Wonderful movie, the Shawshank Redemption.

sarah: sorry about the shortness of the chapters-- in my other fics, they are even shorter! I only have about 2 hours of free time in which to write this. I cannot make them any longer. Besides, I feel drained by the time I reach page 6, and the thematic unit comes to an end at about that time.

enahma: thanks! I'll try! I am almost done! *pants along*

Kemenran: yes, Snape is attached to Harry by now, and so is Harry to him, but they both have trouble admitting such a thing to even themselves.

Mikee: eh, not to me! *points to Voldie and the Death Eaters* to them! *chuckles* I only write what they choose to do.

Myk: *both Harry and Snape pout and stand back to back, hands folded* heh. Has the chapter somewhat answered your questions?

AirElemental101: Noooo! I do not want to have your death on my conscience! *races for chapter*

JaimynsFire: *chuckles* perhaps, perhaps, perhaps! *singing along*

Teigra: Yes he does. *chuckles* it's his hidden talent. Yes, I think he wouldn't expect a muggle attack from a wizard... but from a muggle? I'd be careful. *chuckles*

Phoenix Flight: I answered now! *chuckles* I really did!

walks in with Snape, who taps his wand on her to relieve her headache only enough to write the story see how he gets? gah.

Alright! We are drawing to a close, people! This story is almost done.

Right. I wanted to say something, but I forgot, so let's go on with the story. *grabs the brandy, as Snape has started to rub off*

Chapter 20 *hits play*

Remus looked on Harry's bed in the infirmary, as the boy slept off the effects of the Cruciatus. How had Harry done it? How had it happened so fast, so swiftly, anyway? He shut his eyes. Although he was mad as hell, and close to loathing at Peter, and had been ever since he found out what he had done and caused...

Remus clenched his teeth and looked at the deepest end of the infirmary where the curtains were drawn and charmed to remain shut, allowing nobody to peek or go near that bed. It was where Peter Pettigrew's body had been disposed of for the moment. It was Sirius' ticket to freedom.

It was yet another childhood friend lying there, dead.

Remus' heart bled. He had wanted the bastard alive. To have him live what Sirius had lived through in his place, to suffer for what he had done, not take the easy way out without atoning. Remus swallowed, turning his gaze back to Harry sleeping. Perhaps, if Peter had not died, he still stood a chance for repenting.

Snape had.

"Remus, I need you to talk to all the students from 5th year up."

Dumbledore's voice made Remus straighten up from his thoughts and look at the Headmaster.

"Merlin!"

It really was. Dumbledore was walking straight, eyes terrible to behold, his usual flowing robes replaced with tighter ones-- not entirely dueling robes, but they stayed close to his body and did not hinder movement. Dumbledore is not nearly as out of shape as everyone thinks they are. Does Voldemort work out too? Remus couldn't help thinking. Dumbledore smiled.

"I am glad you approve, Remus. Now, I need you to prepare most students for what will be coming tonight. I do not intend to have them fight," the Headmaster said, "but I do intend them to keep them as far away from panic as possible-- and that can only be achieved if they believe they are not defenseless. Just remember our Harry here."

That made Remus remember to ask while he still had time for questions.

"Headmaster, what happened? How did Peter die?"

Dumbledore sighed.

"I believe he and Harry shared a wizard's bond, in which the one in debt was Peter. In such cases, the indebted wizard cannot in any case inflict bodily harm or death on the wizard he is bonded with. So when Peter casted the Cruciatus on Harry, his spell affected him."

"But Peter was not convulsing or hurting like Harry was."

"Like I said, it affected him. It did not do so in the same way. It just put double the level of strain on his heart that the spell was putting on Harry. Unfortunately, the spell being the Cruciatus..."

Remus nodded. He looked at Harry again. Dumbledore smiled.

"Harry could well have been in Slytherin, I do believe, for that brilliant idea."

"It weakened him."

"Poppy is accomplished enough with Severus' medical history. He will be just fine in an hour."

Remus walked out after that. He had a job to do.

Snuffles skidded to a halt at the Shrieking Shack. . He ran all the way to the secret passage into Hogwarts, past Mrs. Norris -he couldn't resist giving that flea infested feline a fright, though- and into the infirmary.

Harry tilted his head at the pitter patter of the dog and smiled, recognising Snuffles. But the swishing of the matron's robes and her exclamations covered that before Harry had a chance to tell Poppy to please allow the dog inside.

"Shoo! If I kept Granger and Weasley out, I will you as well! This is not a place for dogs and when nobody -makes- me have you in here, you won't be in here. Who knows where you have been you filthy AAAARRRRGH!"

The dog looking up at the matron had suddenly disappeared. The Unspeakable of the Order, the Azkaban fugitive Sirius Black stood in the place of the large dog. And he was looking positively murderous. True to her profession, and since it was a convict but surely one she had survived before, she pointed her wand at him.

"I will stun you if you get closer!" she said in a high pitched voice that made Harry laugh.

"Its alright, Madam Pomfrey!"

The nurse would not budge, eyes wild. Sirius' low and commanding voice, full of his authority as a member of the Order was heard.

"Madam Pomfrey, in the name of the Order of the Phoenix I assure you that I am not a threat to Harry and I order you to step aside."

There was a pause, as if non verbal communication was taking place. It irked Harry to no end as he had no way of knowing what was going on. But before long, Poppy's voice murmured in more respect and she withdrew, and Sirius was on his side. His hand engulfed him and

held him close against his chest. Harry felt considerably better hearing Sirius' heartbeat.

"How did you convince her?" he asked, still in the hug. Sirius smiled down at the son of his best friend, his godson and the closest he had been to family after Remus in his adult life.

"Because I showed her the Phoenix Mark on the back of my palm."

Harry broke the embrace in his surprise.

"You are in the Order? they got Marks? Like Snape's?"

"Dear me, no. First of all, those black things show all the time-- the Order's Mark has to be activated by wand to become visible. And our Marks are far more elegant, I have to add." Sirius smirked, savouring Harry's delight and surprise.

"That is so neat!"

"What you pulled off with Wormtail was neater. I am so proud of you. Your parents would be even prouder." Sirius said affectionately. Harry's face fell.

"I killed yet another man."

"Peter did it to himself. You did nothing to hurt him, bastard though he was. And who else is on that list of yours?"

Harry swallowed.

"C...Cedric."

Sirius sighed and pulled Harry into his hug again.

"Peter did that too. It is all his fault, not yours. His and Voldemort's. Don't you ever forget that."

Harry bit his lips. He still did not know how he felt about Cedric among the other traumatic moments in his life. Then he frowned.

"How do you know all these things?"

Sirius bit his lip, as he helped Harry get up.

"Some, Remus told me..."

"The rest?"

Sirius smirked wryly, although Harry couldn't see that. His voice, however, bounced suggestively.

"Harry... I can't speak about the rest."

Harry looked troubled for a moment, then he seemed to realise... or at least he looked he had or that someone had stunned him.

The Main Hall was full of the 5th, 6th and 7th year classes, all paying attention to their Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor. The room was chilled, even with a few Slytherins smirking.

Draco clenched his teeth, looking straight ahead. Perhaps it was a mistake telling Dumbledore. He was well aware that his father and Professor Snape would be behind those white masks, and while he did not care jack about Voldemort, he did not want to have cause either of the two men's death.

Of course, he knew that both men had an uncanny ability of escaping inevitability.

And once the trouble began, where would Draco himself stand? Sure enough, with Dumbledore he would never suffer as he would with Voldemort's side. But would he have to go against his father? Would he have to look in the eyes of the man he had been struggling for so long to please, and point his wand?

Draco wasn't sure he could do that. It was all so wrong, such a mess. And it was Voldemort's fault.

That snakey bastard, he would point his wand gladly at.

"All the students below your level have been gathered up in a safe place in the castle, and professors Flitwick and Sinistra are going to be with them at all times. You will stay in your dorms, and you will be at the ready, keeping in mind everything I told and showed you. Remember-- strength lies in numbers, but also in faith. And the Headmaster and I have a lot of faith in you."

"That is more than correct." The Headmaster's voice coarsened through the room, and the formidable appearance of the white bearded wizard filled the place where the High Table usually did. It was also accentuated by the cloaked figure and Harry Potter flanking him, tapping ahead, a coral snake visible on his wrist.

Draco snorted in disgust as well as realisation of who was Harry's real aid, by the mere fact that he was only now seeing the real Sasha. (the only Sasha in Hogwarts that was human, was a first year Hufflepuff that didn't know her way to her dorm, much less the greenhouses.)

"I am afraid that in a few minutes, Hogwarts will be under attack. A very reliable source has informed us of such, and the attack will not be done by just wizards. I feel you have a right to know what we will be up against. If everything goes as planned, you will not have to lift a finger, much less a wand."

Nervous laughter permeated the room. Dumbledore lifted his hands again.

"For this reason, you will all remain at your dormitories after this is done."

"What about Harry?" Ron's voice came from the Gryffindor table. Harry smiled towards that side, and he even waved.

"Young Mr. Potter, am afraid has already begun his battle." Dumbledore said sadly, but not pessimistically.

"Before you go, there one more announcement I need to make to you, just in case," Dumbledore said and his eyes twinkled. The whole

room fell silent, and Remus saw the all too familiar smirk under the hood. He smiled as well. This was the moment that was late 15 years.

"On my side, I have Sirius Black."

The Oooohs and Aaaahs of the students covered the 'Go Sirius!' from Ron and clapping from Hermione. Sirius dramatically unhooded himself and all his roguish charm. Now that he was not right out of Azkaban, he looked less feral and more dynamic, like he had been before that fateful Halloween.

"Sirius Black is a member of the Order of the Phoenix, as am I. He is innocent of all charges against him-- except traumatizing Mrs. Norris, I should think." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled at the laughter that erupted first from the Weasleys in the Gryffindor table, then the rest of that particular table, then the Ravenclaws, the Slytherins and the Hufflepuffs.

Sirius felt a warm feeling of deliverance as Dumbledore relayed exactly what had happened that night, and who the real guilty party was. And when the expressions shifted from hostile or guarded to admiration ones, he felt like he could safely die and feel fulfilled.

He snapped out of it quickly.

Snape felt covertly triumphant when Wormtail did not come back with Harry, although he was a rat animagus. He kicked himself mentally for not noticing the sniffer before, for not recognising before that Wormtail was the most disgusting, spineless member of the Marauders, and usually the one that gave them away, too, at least when the prank was on him.

Which meant Black was innocent.

Which meant he could not wish the Kiss on the brat anymore.

Which meant that he should feel bad about judging him in the first place.

Bloody Potters and their friends.

The scowl was enough to not attract attention as Voldemort's impatience grew and grew, and finally it was made clear that Wormtail had bungled up his job and Potter was not coming bound hand and foot. Which was all the better because Snape would have an easier time of keeping his cover.

Voldemort stood.

"We shall not wait any longer. The task must be done tonight. Lucius."

Malfoy senior stepped forward in humble audacity.

"My son will not fail, My Lord." he said with gusto.

"I hope so, for your family's sake, and yours." Voldemort said lazily.

Lucius flinched as he nodded and stepped backwards. Voldemort turned to the rest of the Death Eaters, all gathered around him in a large circle.

"My faithful Death Eaters. Now is the time of Redemption. Now is the time when we tear down Dumbledore and watch the Ministry fall into my hands. Power will be reinstated to the pure and the worthy. Everything is in place... for it to start." he said as Nagini slithered behind him like a king's insignia.

Snape clenched his teeth. That meant that all the critters and creatures that Tom Riddle had allured, created or subjected to his will were now circling Hogwarts, like an orchestra gathered up waiting for the maestro to start playing.

And he had finetuned some of the instruments. The damnation was inescapable.

The winter night was still and silent. There was no wind, no dramatic thunder, there was a deadly calm that would not shift, that seemed to have trapped everything in a capsule. The chill was the only ominous element, as the temperature had dropped lower than it did in mid

December in anticipation of all the evil gathering around the proud castle that had every window and turret lit brightly. In all respects, Hogwarts was looking festive and celebrating.

And indeed, the first guests arrived, and the doors opened widely to admit the men and women, young and old, that came to uphold the pledge they had to the Order and the side of Good. They were approximately 100 people, filling the Main Hall with people and the hearts with hope as the students filed out under their strong, determined, protecting eyes.

Harry heard everyone and nobody, feeling just giddy with the anticipation of the future events as well as the triumph over his godfather's re-institution to honour, first in his classmates' eyes, now in the eyes of those that would fight alongside them. He shuddered, feeling in the same time preoccupied and eager. Sasha hissed at him, her tongue feeling at his skin affectionately.

"Are you afraid, Harry?"

"Somewhat." he replied with a wry smile.

"Nervous?"

"I'll say."

"Would you rather you were not here then?"

Harry thought about it. It was an important question-- it just about summed up everything he often caught himself complaining about: his fame, the weight of the world on his shoulders, the scorn of a certain Potions Master, because he was who he was. So would he rather not, instead?

But then he would not have Sirius. Or Ron and Hermione. Or Remus. He would not be a wizard. He would not trade that for the world. What about being blind?

Then he would not have had Sasha... and in that respect, he would not have met Severus Snape-- not as the real person he was,

unpleasant yet an ally one could rely on. It was his blindness that unlocked that part, made it visible to him.

"Absolutely not, Sasha. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else." Harry hissed with a small self-assured grin.

He had even done some real Divination now he had become blind. Go figure.

From the Forbidden forest, trees shook violently and a dark cloud of birds flew up like ominous smoke signals. Like wraiths, the Dementors seemed to suddenly materialise, making the already cold atmosphere glacial. They spread in a large semi-circle and stood like guards.

Then, the ground shook as 10 towering, lumbering statues of clay marched up ahead, tearing down some of the forbidden forest trees in the process.

Draco clenched his teeth inside the castle as the hour turned midnight. He entered in a room full of aurors, men and women only too eager to shut his whole family in Azkaban. He swallowed. he was now going to consciously help these men and Harry Potter. He was openly allying himself with him. He did not feel fine about it.

But he would feel worse with the Dark Mark.

He raised his wand to the dome in the Main Hall, and as Dumbledore nodded to him, in the midst of all the fighters of Good, he said:

"Morsmordre!"

and that's it!!! wish me good luck on my midterm on tuesday! If I feel I've done well I will also have a chapter for you on that same day.
Snape dares you not to do so

As for my reviewers:

Rei: Eeeepp! I am not sure I will have the stamina... and I have neglected Full Circle to keep my promise to you people.

Mika: I am glad you like it! I am also very glad you decided to let me know. It helps me so much to know my style is popular. You did not overlook any part-- I explained it, or hope I did, today. ;)

shakiya: I only wish I could update daily. *chuckles* but it's not possible.

Barbara: Snape does not need saving. *chuckles* he saves himself when he pleases.

NocturnalFerri: Ubab Ubab Ee?

two2blue: Is Peter's death clearer now?

Nagini: eh... thanks, I think.

Izzy: It was something I had scheduled for explaining today. Did it become clear now? I am sorry for the length of the chapters-- I can't make them longer. They just seem to say 'stop here' every time I write them.

Jarvey: he kinda tricked Peter.

Lord R: I am glad you like! I wanted a new scary thing for this, Dementor like. I searched to find it!

Arizosa: I never forget anyone-- I just did not know what to tell you.
small s

enahma: well this was more or less a preparation for next one. Hope you weren't bored.

candleot: *blushes* thank you so much! Hope you still think so.

Teigra: Draco is one really messed up boy. But he goes by 'what displeases me the least' at the moment. And Snape... I think he likes to feel he's to be blamed. *dodges flying candlestick from Snape*

white owl: thanks!

fyre: I think that Wormtail has few chances of turning to the light after all that has transpired. *s* and I bet everything can be dangerous in Harry's world. I bet the Order will be cool in the books too, because JK prolly knows full well just what it is, and so can weave it safely into the story. I am glad you approve of Draco! I was rather apprehensive of him. As for Harry having a turn around, my concept of him is that he flares up easily, and diffuses equally easily and then has time to ponder. Unlike Ron who just flares up and stays that way. :p

Myk: by the end of the story you will know openly, even if the answer IS hidden in the previous chapter. I am glad you liked the story so far.
s

Lee Lee Potter: um, I hope this chapter went by normally and not too slowly... cos it was a preparation one for the next one.

chips challenge: well, there will be rain before sunshine.

katy999: yes, story has 2 chapters left to go. *s* Sorry.

Goldenfire: you make me blush! But I like it. Thank you.

phreakreader: yeah, he seems batty enough to welcome martyrdom, no? He does have something evry austere about him. As for using God instead of gods, I figured, why would they even HAVE christmas as we do if they do not have the concept of one God. After all, miracles are still standing for them too ;)

Kaat Shadow Lover: eh well. *chuckles* hope you like the ending of the story.

Angel Baby: thanks! will do. Have done!

t.a.g.: Peter was supposed to retrieve Harry so Voldemort could parade into Hogwarts with his head on a pole, more or less. Draco went to Dumbledore with his letter. The rest is for Inquiring Minds to know in later episodes. *chuckles*

hp lovar: Harry did not kill him. So he's in the clear ;)

Mikee: *smiles* I like happy endings too. Thing is, what is your definition of one?

Jaimynsfire: *just sics Snape on you* hee hee

jaycee: I am glad! nobody else seems to! An you figred out Peter's death without me! *hands you golden star* *chuckles* I did not know it would take Sirius Black to prove my profession. But yes. I am a teacher. Which is why I secretly envy Snape at times. hee hee.

Marie: No, I know pretty well how this is going to be resolved. *grins* but I do fine tune it as I go along. I hope your questions around the debt are answered?

Vivian Marie: *eyes you warily and nods quickly in case you are prepared to open fire the mafia way if she says humbly, no* hee. Thanks.

Kemenran: Harry might be more inclined to openly admit something like that to SNape. Snape... I don't know. With actions, maybe. With words... tough.

Someone Reading: I am trying my best. But I am a working, studying girl. Have mercy. *chuckles*

LoMaRiBa: hope you like this one!

walks in for the official chapter-before-last It appears there will be 22 chapters of this story after all, people. If I get the time to write everything I want in this chapter. Or unless you want an epilogue or something (though I suck at epilogues). *Snape gets some red wine this time, thinking red is appropriate for the occasion*

Before I start, I feel I should thank JaimynsFire. I owe every single Sirius Black idea to her! *glare from Snape, I assume Sirius blows a kiss at the lovely lady* As well as the quote of Sirius about not being able to speak about what he does. Thank you for inspiring this version of the lovely mongrel, JaimynsFire!

Alright. With that out of the way, let us proceed. *Snape leans back with the glass*

Chapter 21 *hits play*

Snape looked upon the castle he was supposed to be approaching as an enemy-- Hogwarts, his home. The only place he could call that, containing the only people he actually cared enough to breathe for. It felt a bit like being a cancerous cell about to attack the body that was sustaining him. It did not help his psychological state much, but it did steel his resolution to go through with the plan that he had silently, slowly hatched without either Voldemort or Dumbledore knowing. Snape loved surprises, when it was he that was giving them and they were extremely unpleasant.

He was after all, the Marauders' greatest opponent.

Voldemort pointed with his skeletal, abnormally white fingers towards the castle and the Dementors wafted towards there. As the dark Azkaban guards seemed to permeate the perimeter of the castle, and onto the inner grounds. It had begun.

"My Lord, the castle is brightly lit." a Death Eater pointed out. Snape rushed to patch things up before Voldemort got any funny suspicions.

"It must be that Wormtail that bangled up his mission. Let us retreat, my Lord, Dumbledore is forewarned."

"I shall not escape like a weak fool! Sanguiflus!" Voldemort hissed and pointed his wand, cursing swiftly, venting all his frustration on the potions master. The curse hit full blast and blood started flowing from Snape's eyes, nose and mouth. Snape felt the world go bright and spin for a while before he could think and speak again. He gingerly touched the wetness on his face and then meekly wiped the excess blood on the sleeve of his robe, muttering his apologies. Voldemort ignored him more than the dust on his boots as he turned to the rest of the Death Eaters:

"Does anyone else feel the need to object to this mission?" he asked venomously.

None felt the need to reply. Voldemort nodded to nobody in particular, his crimson eyes slightly luminescent in the darkness.

At that moment, the Dark Mark rose high in the air, casting a dull green glow over the castle walls. Snape felt the slight tremble in the air as the wards of Hogwarts were weakened from inside enough to be breachable by someone knowledgeable enough. Voldemort immediately muttered, waving his wand in the air, and there was a slight moan in atmosphere as the wards were completely pulled down. The Dementors entered the castle.

Voldemort smiled like a cobra as he turned to Lucius.

"Young Draco did well. Bring him to me to mark when I call you next," he said and the eldest Malfoy grinned in triumph for his only son. Voldemort raised his wand.

"My brothers, my sisters! This is the time we get what is rightfully ours! Spare nothing and nobody!" he said and the Death Eaters rushed, wands out.

As Snape ran with the rest, one thought troubled him:

Why the hell hasn't he ordered the golems to mobilize yet?

The greenish fumes from the grotesque Mark now hovering high in the enchanted dome had not really dispersed from Draco's wand

when Harry hissed, Dumbledore barked orders to the Aurors, Sirius yelled for Remus to watch out and countless Dementors entered the room, instantly chilling it, grabbing blindly, greedily at anyone they could get. Most had walked in with their hoods off already.

Countless Patronus forms erupted, directed at every single area. Draco watched as Harry gripped his wand like a club now, and wacked ahead of him. He sent an Auror tumbling to the ground, and the silvery stag from his wand - the very same that had bowled him over not too long ago during a quidditch match - galloped fast at the Dementor that was making everyone kneel shuddering at a meter radius.

The Dementors were losing the battle, that could be easily fathomed. Draco was glad as he shivered momentarily. He was not surprised. When it came to actual battle, Dementors were not the snappiest or deadliest thing in the block.

The morale had started going up with the temperature, as less and less Dementors remained in the room when Sirius' voice was heard above the hubbub:

"Dementors were a decoy!"

The first real wave of attack hit full blast, as most of the aurors were occupied in evading or fighting Dementors that most Death Eaters had entered without even being noticed-- after all, you could see black robes everywhere. Only it seemed as if magically after Sirius Black's alerted yell, all the black robes and cloaks were also featuring a faceless, relentless white mask.

This time, curses, hexes and numerous other attacks started actually taking a toll. Bodies upon bodies they fell, aurors and Death Eaters, some dead, some dying, others praying not to. Avada Kedavra was what they used the most, from the Dark Lord's side, and various stunning and impeding curses were hurled from the Aurors.

Harry started having to pay attention to his foothold, as the floor started to become slippery and way too littered with bodies. Sasha had slithered up his arm and around his neck like a necklace, and

she kept her eyes out for whatever Harry hissed at her-- which wasn't much, as Harry was following Snape's advice and was relying on his hearing rather than any other sense. As a result, he was moving far too fast to be offering any real aim, and he was pointing his wand far too rapidly for his curses to be avoided. Added to the fact that there were more than 200 people in the room, Harry's curse always found its mark. But the young Gryffindor was not interested in body count. He was looking for two people.

Severus Snape, and Tom Riddle.

"Ron, we really shouldn't--"

"Stop arguing, Hermione! If you didn't want to help Harry, you wouldn't be running along with me!" Ron snorted as he and Hermione rushed to enter the fray. For a moment, they stopped at the pure horror their eyes met:

Bodies were sprawled all across the floor, Death Eater and Auror alike. People were trampling on them, trying to get away or towards their target. Hideous curses killed in graphic ways, or in the terrible finality of Avada Kedavra. For one dizzying moment, the two Gryffindor 5th years had trouble knowing the friend from the enemy.

But then Ron saw his father, and the curse he was being put under, and he yelled, wand out, as he ran over there, hurling at the Death Eater whatever he could think of worse. Hermione rushed with him, flicking her wand this way and that, moving bodies and fighting men out of her friend's way, until they got to Arthur Weasley.

"Father?" Ron said, cradling the waxy form. Arthur opened his eyes softly, and fear seized them.

"You... should not... be here!" he managed to gasp.

"Ron, we have to get somewhere better! I can't keep deflecting more and more of them!" Hermione cried, and Ron looked up, blinking away the blurriness, and saw that Hermione had them in a Bubble Shield. He nodded and got up, supporting most of his father's weight.

"I'll take him somewhere safe, and I will be back. Look for Harry!" he yelled as he ran off, the bubble popping as soon as he was out of range.

Hermione had no choice but to throw herself into battle, in an effort to fight her blind friend. She had never seen him fight, as Harry never had agreed to take her along for his clandestine dueling sessions, and so she had no way of knowing if he was capable of handling this in the first place.

But it was impossible to get a view or look for anyone when you were busy protecting yourself and others. She wanted to shout for him--she was pretty confident that he would manage to hear her over the battle hullabaloo. Harry had learned to distinguish sounds from noise a long time ago. But she did not. If he was fighting, he did not need to worry about her, or Ron.

She only hoped she could catch a glimpse of him at some point.

Snape tried not to take too much part in the battle. If his plan was to work, he had to stay somewhat intact and sentient until at least the Golems were called by Voldemort. So he managed to stay in the fringes of the whole pulsing mass of fighting people, deflecting curses and not really attacking anyone, protecting himself so that he would be able to protect others in a while. He knew that this could not possibly be the bulk of the battle.

He saw Harry weaving in and around Death Eaters, hurling curses all around him, and all of them hitting by sheer proximity-- some even at point blank.

He allowed himself a brief fraction of a moment to admire the teen whose fighting value was equal to two sighted aurors. I did this. No matter how unworthy I am, this is mainly my doing. He looked around, trying to catch sight of Voldemort. Where had the Mudblood gone to this time?

Harry felt a shearing pain come from his scar and he knew. Sasha hissed in fear. Harry swallowed, controlling his, and hissed softly to his familiar:

"Sasha, get off me. Make sure you don't get trampled on."

"I do not abandon those I am bonded to."

"Sasha I do not have time to argue."

"Then don't!" the snake hissed bossily, and furrowed deeper under Harry's clothes. Harry felt the cool band slither down his wand arm and snugly stay coiled around his forearm, over the tawn glove. Harry had no more time trying to argue with the coral snake that this was Voldemort, not your occasional Malfoy he was about to face.

He was hit with the cruciatus. For the second time this night. The pain erupted in his mind hot and rough and aggravating. He knew he had fallen on the ground, just as he knew he would not let his wand drop, just as he knew that everyone was now staring more than fighting. It was yet again, Harry Potter against Tom Riddle, Voldemort. And Harry was at the moment struggling like a fish out of water trying to get back inside.

The curse was let up abruptly. It was as painful as being hit with it.

"Ssso... thiss iss the blind boy that issss sssso hard to find... and kill?" he smiled, his crimson eyes enjoying the sight of the quivering boy struggling to his feet.

"I... am not afraid to fight you. I've done it before." Harry said, unsure of why he was talking in the first place. His voice sounded frazzled and rather like a yapping dog's. Of course his throat did hurt, as did the rest of his body.

Voldemort did not like Harry's allusion to their past skirmishes. It was never a good topic to bring up in his presence, and actually no living creature ever had-- not even Nagini. And this wiry, flailing boy was not going to be any different. Voldemort raised his wand swiftly to attack--

-- and found himself shielding from a well-delivered Lepidae curse. The brat was fast. Much faster than any dueller he had faced-- and

Voldemort had faced (and killed) quite a few. He frowned. Harry had apparently found a way to make his curses home in-- although it was obvious this was tiring the boy and was not used superfluously. He had underestimated the boy yet again, this time because of Snape's reassurances that the boy was meek and incompetent because of his blindness. He would deal with the filthy greaseball when the time came.

"Very good, Harry Potter. Much more interesting than the last time we... duelled. Let me cater to our friends before I... devote to you my fullest attention." he said lazily as he flicked his wand, muttering softly, and Harry dodged a body bind. However, this gave Voldemort the time to say in a loud, slurry voice:

"Ameth Fortuna Tuera Molta!"

Immediately the ground shook at the rhythm of lumbering, heavy footsteps, and great noise of rock protesting against hits and yielding covered even the yells of fear. The golems tore down part of the wall in the main hall, trampling and burying under them the unlucky bystanders. Immediately, aurors started moving to get a good aim to erase the A from the word AMETH on the faceless brow.

The golems lumbered around, trampling on aurors, and did not discriminate too much around Death Eaters either. Draco stopped running only when he nearly tripped over Weasley's half buried body trying desperately not to escape, but to reach further into the debris. Draco felt like moving on, but stared. In Ron's voice the same primal fear that was in his heart reigned.

Without thinking, Draco flicked his wand, moving stones away, helping Ron reveal his father's body. Ron blinked in awe. Draco sneered.

"I won't be here everytime you need to unbury your father, Weasel." he said and moved on.

Only to be hit with a curse from his own father.

"Treacherous, stupid boy! Helping muggle lovers on our Lord's highest mom--" Lucius found himself stunned. Draco looked up to see Ron frozen in the same position as before, still watching him gaping, but with his wand arm extended appropriately for a good stun hex to the head of the Malfoy family.

"Mental!" Ron whispered to himself, eyes as round as the gray ones he was gazing into, the surprise for the unexpected help they gave to each other tangible.

Only one golem was lying lifeless. The rest were still lumbering around, trying to kill and destroy. Dumbledore ordered the aurors to keep away, to avoid rather than attack, as every piece breaking off seemed to get a life of its own and kept trying to cause damage and harm in every possible way.

He aimed carefully at the second golem about to squash Remus and Hermione, and breathed an order, jabbing his wand. It froze forever in that position, the word METH now on its brow. But Dumbledore had concentrated greatly, so that his countercharm would not fail, so that it would breach Voldemort's ward of blood on the creature. It was a feat of utmost skill and power, and it demanded a lot of energy and concentration.

Which was why he was the one that had stopped both the now-inanimate golems.

But he sacrificed duelling readiness-- and Avery's curse hit the Headmaster before Remus could do anything about it but shout.

Voldemort was engaged in battle with Harry-- and he was finding it much more challenging than usual, which was making him madder and madder. Whatever curse he threw at the boy, Harry had already a shield up was dodging it. He was reluctant to use the Avada Kedavra, for fear of last year's events repeating themselves. Voldemort had no intention of seeing the Potters again-- it was the main reason he had gone personally to execute them that oh-so-important night.

And he could not afford to let his hold on the blood connection with the golems flicker, because the counfounded old coot Dumbledore was already breaching it steadily.

He needed to win this, tonight. And he was winning, yet. He was in Hogwarts, there were more aurors than Death Eaters on the floor, and he was about to kill Harry Potter.

If only the bloody brat would keep still like a proper victim. Voldemort was unfortunately hit with Harry's Ento- Impedimenta curse while ruminating all this. He was for a few moments under the curse's influence...

... and Harry realised as he stumbled, that he had used Ento about 8 times more than he should have... and he was feeling like he had no blood nor life left.

Voldemort would surely get him now.

Dumbledore is down! you -idiot!-

Snape threw away his mask, and cursed everyone that came his way, now not keeping back. He had lingered, and the man he considered his real father was perhaps even dead-- who knows what curse it was he got hit with. He was aware of Potter going down as well after dealing Tom Riddle a good one. Of all the incompetent--

Whatever the hell was he waiting for? This? A dramatic entrance or a royal invitation to do what he had planned? Fear was not a good excuse, nor was apprehension good enough either. He had decided to protect, and he was making a mess of it, just like he always made a mess of everything that was important to him.

Severus could not take it anymore. He stood a bit sideways to the golems and shouted at the top of his lungs, jabbing his wand in command at them:

"Sanguis Obeir Ameth!"

The golems stopped, and seemed ambivalent. The active blood bond was fighting the inactive one that was now struggling for supremacy: For Snape had not only included Voldemort's blood in the clay-- he had also mixed his own.

The Dark Lord's willpower was not easy to overpower, and Snape almost shut his eyes in his frenzied effort to control all of the remaining golems. For a while, nothing happened. But a shaky mutter drew the Dark Lord's attention. Voldemort had to dodge Harry's combination hex, as the boy was holding his wand shakily from the ground, and the struggle for dominion was over fast-- and Snape was the winner. I did it.

For one more time the whole room stood still, few realising why the golems had stopped wreaking havoc and even fewer understanding how and who did it. Even Harry stopped, the eerie stillness and quiet making him pause, and Voldemort's terrible crimson eyes focused on the rival he did not expect-- but should have, perhaps.

"Ssssseverus!"

Snape's eyes glistened triumphantly as he spat at the Dark mudblood Lord:

"Sanguis Obeir Meth!"

The bloody looking A was magically erased, the golems starting to slowly dissolve into their raw materials, becoming shapeless masses of dirt and clay. Voldemort's leverage in the battle was suddenly turned to useless dust.

Dumbledore opened his eyes weakly, and stared into those of Hermione and Remus. Remus grinned through his anxiety.

"It's done, Headmaster, the Golems are gone!"

Dumbledore smiled and flicked his wand, summoning an old friend. It was time an end was put, and the aurors and professors remaining standing knew it just as well.

Voldemort seethed in pure anger at the traitor that had twice fooled him, at the child that was a formidable opponent even when impaired. He was beaten, and again he was in the loser's position because he had not had the omnipotence that he boasted to possess. He had to go, to keep his present state of being, and return again later.

But at least he had time for quick retributions. He growled at Snape as he was pointing his wand for further action. A blue lightning engulfed Snape before anything could happen. Then Voldemort disappeared. Any Death Eaters that were capable, also did the same.

They left behind them a mess of dirt, clay, debris, bodies, blood. The Headmaster was injured. Harry Potter was in dangerous exhaustion.

And Severus Snape was dying.

and that is all for now. *s* I have no time to answer reviews at the moment, but I will tomorrow, or the day after, promise. Along with any more you might want to send me. Just for the record:

Dumbledore does not work out-- he only is stronger than one would expect. Remus was jesting.

Alright! I can't stand it when people ask me things, I always have to deliver! turns to Snape Is that a Gryffindor quality? Snape looks away, disgusted I take that as a yes. laughs

Riiiiight. Lessee what happens, eh? Will Snape die? looks at him, he sneers so that his teeth show in a dangerous manner Careful, or the Vamp rumour will be rejuvenated. Snape scowls and sips his amaretto

heh.

By the way-- I have no idea what Professor Sprout's first name is, so I gave her a generic flower name. If anyone knows what it is, please tell me.

Let's not keep you waiting any longer, shall we?

Chapter 22 hits play

Dumbledore heard Sirius call for the mediwizards, that Snape was down and no, he is not one of them, you morons, wasn't it obvious.

"Help me up." he ordered Remus, and the werewolf complied. The Headmaster scanned the derelict room, taking everything in until his eyes focused on the one writhing form surrounded by the ominous blue glow.

"No, Severus..." Dumbledore whispered and tried to get up, but found he couldn't.

A melodious, strong trill was heard from above as Fawkes answered to Dumbledore's summons and flew in, looking as if really made of fire. The phoenix was trilling in a very special way, in odd notes, short pauses as it circled the area of the battle-- and the Phoenix Marks, in all the members of the Order of the Phoenix, to which the aurors had been pledged, shone on the back of the hands, like golden fire:

A design of a flying phoenix in a circle created by its own tail feathers appeared on Dumbledore's hand first, making his whole arm glow,

and then gradually in all the members of the Order present in the room:

Sirius Black.

Remus Lupin.

Sybil Trelawney.

Arabella Figg.

Dandyia Sprout.

Arthur Weasley.

Bill Weasley...

Severus Snape.

As the Phoenix Mark appeared on the Potions Master's twitching hand, the bluish glow surrounding the convulsing man seemed to succumb. If anyone thought that was a sign of betterment, they were soon disproven, because Snape arched backwards, his eyes flashing open widely, and heaved in air in anguished gulps making a horrible eeeeeek sound every time he tried to breathe. The low blue glow showed in his pupils like a faint flicker of light in the dark midnight black of his irises-- it was eerie and unsettling.

Of the people in the room remaining standing, a very wide circle was formed around Snape as he was writhing on the floor, but none approached. They all watched him go through the torture and the slow, tantalizing fight against the curse gradually pulling away his life-force. None budged, and virtually no sounds were made except Fawkes' song and that horrible eeeek extracted from the depths of the Potion Master's body.

Sirius broke the circle, feeling disgusted. He did not like Snape-- not in the least, and he doubted he would ever be able to spend more than 10 minutes in the same room with the man and remain civilized. But that was on a personal level, and valid when Snape was fully

healthy and all greasy and snarly and just begging to be a target for a good prank-- not when he was writhing on the floor and everyone was watching and doing nothing.

He had long ago realised that he did not really want Severus Snape dead, and in a rather graphic way. He would always be grateful to James for foiling his plan and making him understand what he had been so stubborn to.

"What are you staring at!" he said, waving his golden glowing hand at all the aurors gaping at a member of the Order being in a Death Eater outfit and dying. It seemed to be shortcircuiting their minds.

By that time, Remus had helped Dumbledore to where Sirius was standing.

"What can we do, Headmaster?" Remus asked softly at the injured Leader of the Order.

Dumbledore did not answer, but he looked to Fawkes, and the phoenix soared down with a high trill towards Severus.

Everyone watched the tears, shining like diamonds, falling.

Harry felt as if his head was filled with cotton. He hated this sensation, because it impeded his hearing as well, and he had no real way of knowing what exactly was going on around him. He knew someone was jostling him around, handling him, and he felt charms taking effect on him, though what exactly they were doing he could not understand. Everything was like an echo from far, far away. Had the last, the very last curse he had casted on Voldemort (a naturally homing in Lepidae) distracted him enough to aid whatever Snape was doing?

He had to get out of this confounded stupor. Damn Ento charm-- handy as though it became when he was up against Tom Riddle. It had drained him of all energy and he could barely move.

And where was Snape? When that had happened once, all it had taken was a potion and a good nap (and a rather lengthy talk on

Gryffindor thickness, stupidity, etc etc etc). Why wasn't he here now to talk him down and help him, like he usually did? Where was Ron? He had heard him somewhere, he was positive, and that implied Hermione would be nearby. What was going on? He needed to get out of this prison of incompetence!

Noise started to become sound, tantalizingly slowly...

... think he's out of danger...

... Harry...? Can you hear me? Harry? Harry, there's a lad, can you talk?"

Harry drew in a shaky breath.

"Yes... S..irius?"

A relieved chuckle.

"Yes Harry. Goodness, we thought we'd lost you."

Hands helped him up. Harry realised he was in bed. That ruled out the Main Hall.

"What happened, Sirius? Where am I?"

"You are in the infirmary, Harry." Remus' calm voice. Harry could detect strain amongst the relieved feelings. Had he really been so down under? He fingered his hand. The tawn glove was off, he could feel his scarring. He felt suddenly naked near Sirius. He can't not have seen his arm.

Apparently there must have been some physical reaction, because Sirius rushed to hug him and reassure him.

"Don't feel bad Harry, it's all alright. Really now. We had to give you a transfusion, and couldn't find a good vein on the left arm; I am sorry, but really, it doesn't mean anything." Sirius was talking fast and anxiously. Harry swallowed and nodded. He felt that although Sirius was doing his best to soothe him, he had had his own temper tantrum

while Harry was out cold. He idly recalled that the animagus had never seen his arm unbandaged or gloveless.

"May I have it back, please?" he asked softly. Sirius handed the glove to him wordlessly, and he pulled it on. The young gryffindor felt instantly better.

"Where is Sasha?"

"The snake? Remus has gone to fetch her for you. He'll be here any minute." Sirius said gently.

Harry nodded. There was a short pause between the godfather and the godson. Then Harry asked again.

"What is the date?"

"3rd December. You have been out cold for a week."

A pause again. He swallowed.

"What happened?"

"We kicked old You-Know-Who's arse is what happened." Sirius said in that naughty, prankster voice that he had, that always put a smile on Harry's face no matter how depressed the young gryffindor might be feeling. He smiled.

Remus entered, and Harry heard Sasha's happy hissing at seeing him awake and sitting up. Soon the cool band of her body slithered up to its normal position. Harry petted her.

"How are you Harry?" Remus' voice was its usual pleasant, calm hues. But didn't he detect a tiredness, a sorrow in there?

"I'm just fine, Remus. I am learning of what happened. I guess it was kind of dumb to use Ento so many times. But I wanted to be sure with Voldemort."

"It's understandable Harry. And you gave Snape just the leverage he needed to get control of the golems." Remus said. "Nobody expected that you'd provide the much needed distraction at the perfect time." the DADA professor added with pride and calm content.

Harry almost smirked to himself as he stroked Sasha's head, contemplating the events. All his predictions had come true. Just every single one in ways he could never had imagined on his own. The Standoff had been with Snape-- which was pretty imaginable, but not what it would have been about... then the Friendly Peril had served him in his meeting with Wormtail, which was definately completely out of anything Harry could have imagined.

And the Unexpected Ally was not a person that would help him in need. The Unexpected Ally was himself, helping Snape when he'd needed it.

Harry couldn't postpone the dreaded question any longer. He was afraid to ask and in the same had to learn.

"Sirius... where is Snape?"

The pause that ensued was more than unsettling, more so because Harry could not see the expressions of either the animagus or the werewolf. And dread seized his heart that Snape was not anywhere where Harry could go.

"Is he dead? Sirius? Remus? Did he die? Where is he?" Harry asked with urgency and despair. He remembered the last words he had told Snape before the Potions Master had left to fight, serve the Order, and with it all the wizarding world.

You will never know!

Harry would never forgive himself. How could he have been so heartless? After all that Snape had done for him, for making him strong enough to face Voldemort and have a chance against the Dark Lord, how could he have been so petty and vindictive?

He almost did not hear the answer.

"Harry, don't be upset. You are very weak, yet. The Headmaster is going to be here soon, and he will tell you everything."

Harry covered his hands, as his mind screamed one thought: He can't be dead!

Draco sat idly outside a room in St. Mungo's, a cup of coffee in his hand. It was funny that he decided he liked the dark brown liquid better than pumpkin juice lately. He sighed, still trying to contemplate where he was standing after everything that had transpired. Obviously he could not go visit his father in Azkaban, or it would be widely known that he had actively chosen sides.

Draco wasn't sure he should even tell his mother. While he knew she did not bear a Dark Mark, he was not at all certain she would take kindly to this betrayal to, at least, the Malfoy family. Since he was, however, quite certain that Narcissa Malfoy was not as attached to Lucius as to pay him visits or even feel remotely sorry about the Death Eater's incarceration, it was relatively safe for Draco to return home and play it safe.

He watched as a nurse walked out of the room he was there for. He smirked to himself. Who would have thought it, Snape, the most Slytherin man Draco had ever known, the harshest and most fitting to the definition of everything Death Eater-ish, would actually be a spy, and not only a spy but one of the elite Order members.

The man had balls of solid rock, that was a fact.

Draco sipped his coffee again, when he saw a wiry figure walk up, with Sirius Black, the redeemed convict, bringing up the rear. He looked at Harry Potter with some disdain, but at least he did not feel the waves of rage he had usually experienced when he watched the blind boy tap around and walk with the casual breeze of any sighted person. He got up.

"I see you are up." Draco said simply, a little awkwardly. It was odd how it was hard to make a simple conversation when it had been so easy to pick a fight. Harry nodded.

"Yes, I am. Ron told me about his dad. Thanks."

"It was not -your- father, Potter. You are not here for me, are you?" he asked sardonically, and Harry fidgeted and shook his head.

Draco sneered.

"Then spare me the pleasantries. It's the door on the left, right here."

Harry yet hesitated.

"Say, Malfoy..."

Draco waited. Harry seemed to change his mind about what he was about to ask the slytherin, and he turned to Sirius.

"Uh... I'd like to go in alone."

Sirius nodded.

"I understand Harry. I'll wait here."

Harry walked into the sterile room in St. Mungos. He heard the shallow breathing, which was the only sound in the room. Gently tapping about, he found a chair and sat down. Sasha hissed at him.

"I am not tired, Harry."

"I know Sasha. I am afraid to look, is all." Harry hissed back at the snake and petted her.

"He is sickly pale, and very thin, Harry. He looks like sleeping." Sasha said and Harry sighed.

The coral snake flicked her tongue against Harry's fingers in the usual caress that she offered the boy every time she felt his distress, and went quiet, knowing that Harry would establish a mind link with her when he wanted to.

For a long time, Harry sat in the uncomfortable chair, hearing the soft, shallow breathing. He was grateful to hear this attestation of the man in front of him in the bed being alive. He sighed and pulled the chair closer, until he was very near the bedside.

"I'm so sorry, Professor." Harry said quietly, with more feeling than any apology he had ever offered the man before. Harry swallowed, and like he had done once before, he outstretched his hand until his fingertips touched the greasy hair. Harry smiled thinly. His hair really was so greasy one could use the oil to fry eggs in.

His hand travelled up until he reached the temple-- his skin was remarkably clammy and cool. His fingertips felt the man's forehead, then travelled down the hooked nose--

"Can't... someone... find peace from your likes... Potter?"

Harry jumped so much he almost fell off the chair. Severus Snape's voice was faint, a whisper really, and had a panting quality, as if it was coming from deep inside his body. Yet, it still retained all the silky disdain that Harry thought would never hear again.

"Merlin! You were supposed to be in a deep coma!" Harry blurted out, a smile creeping on his face.

Snape coughed a bit and sighed. His breathing did not improve-- Harry could tell that even though he was awake, the Potions Master was by no means fit.

"Sorry to disappoint, Potter." the sarcastic whisper wafted through Harry's thoughts. The gryffindor smiled.

"Don't be. I can't tell you how glad I am you... you are not..."

"Dead? Don't be so melodramatic, really Potter." Snape sneered weakly, turning his head carefully to look at the boy.

Harry's unfocused eyes were bright, dancing with joy while staring somewhere over the opposite wall; although the boy was pale and sickly looking, colour adorned his cheeks because of the strong

emotions of happiness and relief that he was experiencing. Snape smiled, feeling safe that that would go unnoticed. It felt so good to have someone other than Dumbledore look so decidedly hilarious about him being saved, being alive. It was such a rare occurrence, after all.

Then, the boy sombered up, and Snape arched an eyebrow. The Potions Master made sure not to move too much-- even the slightest jolt caused him extreme dizziness; anything more than that and he simply passed out. That was why the nurse had put a charm on him to prevent unnecessary jolting. He watched as Harry fidgeted, apparently trying to make himself talk about something specific.

"Out with it, Potter. You obviously.. are not here on a social call." Snape said loftily, although he himself was a little scared at what the boy might tell him. After all, the damn gryffindor had proven how capable he was of penetrating the Head of Slytherin's armour and hurting him to the quick with a few words.

Harry took a deep breath. He hissed something to Sasha, then cleared his throat and began.

"Last time... we.. erh... talked, you asked me something."

There was a pause from Snape. Harry could hear him hold his breath. God, it means so much to him, then? Harry continued.

"I... refused to answer you then. I am sorry. I should have. I just..."

"Spare me the sentimentalities, Potter." Snape said hurriedly, so much that he had to cough and breathe a few times to ease the strain on his chest. Signs of weakness that made Snape feel even more vulnerable and helpless, thus retreating even more in whatever semblance of indifference he could muster. Which wasn't much when he couldn't control even the rate of his breathing effectively.

Harry swallowed.

"Yes, Professor. Well... you wanted to know what happened. Do you still want me to tell you?"

"Since you came all the way here for this, do not let me stop you." Snape added just a little bit of sarcasm, but his heart skipped beats.

Harry took in a deep breath again.

"When I was living with... with them, I had to get up early, about 5 to 6 in the morning, to cook breakfast for everyone. I always had to cook bacon, because it's a favourite with them." Harry took everything a step at a time, wringing his hands together. It still was so very hard to think, much less talk about it.

"Unfortunately... I had had a vision the night before, so I was completely sleepless. I forgot that I had put the bacon to fry, and I burnt it. Uncle Vernon is usually the first to come down, because he leaves early for work-- and well.. he tried to ... hit me across the face. And I tried to thwart the blow, so he grabbed my arm and pressed it on the cooker's plate. And I screamed and glared at him. I guess he was afraid I might do something to him like I had done with Aunt Marge because he kept shouting not to glare at him, and he grabbed my head and banged it against anything he could have access to."

The lengthy pause fell again. Harry wasn't sure what to make of it, although the anger, the rage was tangible in the air.

"I don't remember anything else after that." he said quietly.

When Snape would not answer, Harry gripped the cane handle and finished the whole narration.

"This... all took place at about quarter past six. Unless you were sent for me earlier, there is nothing you could have done to save me from... from any of that."

The ragged breathing was still the only indication that Snape was even there. The Professor and the student sat for a long time together, saying nothing, just savouring each other's presence and this odd way of openness between them. Finally, Snape spoke.

"I... am sorry, Potter."

Harry blinked. The Potions Master seemed to keep surprising him today.

"Sir?"

"I thought I was clear enough. I am sorry. For making you recall all this, and for taking my time to come for you. I assure you, that had I known, I would have acted quite differently." Snape said gruffly. Harry thought that this was the most affectionate tone Snape's unpracticed voice could employ. It was endearing, really, if one thought about it.

"You made up for it greatly, sir. I am glad you will still be my Potions Professor." Harry said.

He heard the door open, and Sirius' voice.

"Harry, are you alright? It's time to go buddy. You will exhaust yourself otherwise." the animagus' voice was gentle. He and Snape exchanged glances as Harry nodded and got up, making his way towards the door.

The silent truce between them was once more confirmed in that brief, non-verbal communication between the professor and the animagus. Harry walked up to the door. Just as he was leaving, he smiled a little mischeviously. I know I shouldn't, but I can't resist.

"I'll see you at Hogwarts, Professor... and you know what? You look great when you smile."

Snape swore under his breath as the door shut softly, but he couldn't help a small quirk of the mouth at the thought.

He had forgotten of the goddamn snake and the mind link Harry occasionally used.

Idiot.

Finis

YAY! confetti, streamers, party crackers, Dumbledore in lead of conga line I am done! I am finished! This is one complete little fic, I tell you! WEEEEEEEE!

You could ask for an epilogue, but honestly I wouldn't know what to put in it. So DON'T, unless you want to see something VERY SPECIFIC. grins But other than that Tell me what you thought! Please please please! Share my joy! yayyyy! offers Snape his party hat hehe.

2007 update

Hey everyone!

This is Tantz (Tantz Aerine) speaking. I am posting this here as an Author's note because I do believe it has more chances of being read than posting it only on my profile.

First things first:

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!

I hope you get all you ever wish for this year, and the one after that, and the next one... and so on and so forth.

There is a statement, in the profile and the Go With The Tide II fanfiction, about my decisions regarding writing (or rather, not writing any more fanfiction, remember?). Here's me sharing my news with you then, regarding that!

I have finally (officially) published my very own fantasy book!

It is called The Art of Veiling: Awareness and is the first book out of three (which are already written and under publication).

It is my pride and joy, the work of more than 5 years in which I have really done my very best with characters who still hold me captive (much, much more than Snape did... you will find that most of my characters are far more demanding than he ever was!). I believe that

they will be just as fascinating to you as they were to the editor and are now to the people who are reading it as we speak!!

I would really, really appreciate it if you would give it a chance. If you liked my style, if you enjoyed all these interactions I wrote between Snape and Harry, I am just trembling with excitement and anticipation of how much you'll enjoy my style when I go all out and use full power in my own universe. shivers Heh heh.

Plus, I bet you'll be surprised when it comes to Elves, Dragons and Humans in my world: they have never been described and developed in the way they have been in my book before! (---- this is another person's quote, not mine)

I know this is a plug, but I am also so incredibly thrilled to share I can't wait or be demure or something- I need to talk about this!!!

I know some of you wonderful reviewers have already tried it out and your comments have made me confident enough to post this here and be shameless in speaking about it!

(Thank you for reading it those who got it! I am glad you are enjoying it!)

Those of you who haven't, I am hoping you will! It will help me go on writing, and it will give me a chance to renew this wonderful relationship I have enjoyed through writing fanfiction with you which I am missing so direly.

The url to the site where you can see the book cover (it BLINKS! Woo hoo!), read the blurb and, if you want, order it is:

[www . mindpower . gr / ennews . php](http://www.mindpower.gr/ennews.php) (just minus the spaces)

If you can't see it, the link is also up in my profile.

I can't wait to hear from you! I will have more news about my stories soon!

Talk to you soon!

Tantz Aerine